

EARLY
METHODISM
IN
SHROPSHIRE,

By W. PHILLIPS.

Brewsbury :

W. G. NAPIER, PRINTER.

1896.

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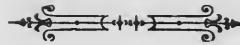
With the author's kind regards,
and his thanks for assistance
rendered to him in completing
this little work.



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SHEARMEN'S HALL.

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EARLY METHODISM

IN SHREWSBURY.

CHAPTER I.

Reasons for this work—Wesley's first visit to Shrewsbury—John Fletcher at Tern Hall—His Piety—Ordained Deacon—His Preaching—Prepared he way for Wesley's Visit—Mrs. Glynne—John Appleton.

MHE very scanty accounts to be found in our well-known local histories of the introduction of Methodism into Shrewsbury, render it necessary to search further afield for such scattered facts as can be collected from contemporary and later literature, and combine them into a consecutive narrative. On the present occasion this can only be partially done owing to the difficulty of the task. It should not, however, be delayed longer, for although the first attempt to accomplish such a work may result in the production of a very imperfect sketch, that sketch may form the basis on which a more complete history may be raised hereafter. It may also by its very deficiencies tend to provoke a spirit of enquiry and investigation amongst those who have more time at their command than the present writer. Although this

subject has a peculiar interest for the Members of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in the Shrewsbury Circuit, it possesses an interest which commends it to a much wider circle of christian people in Shropshire generally. Even members of the Church of England, and the large body of orthodox Dissenters, to say nothing of the various off-shoots of Methodism, look upon John Wesley as a man of God. Many impartial churchmen are ready to acknowledge that their forefathers misunderstood him; and they regret that the doors of the churches were closed against him, and his, so regarded, erratic and unauthorised labourers. Shrewsbury, as we shall see, formed no exception to the treatment he met with elsewhere.

As far as I have been able to ascertain it was in 1761 (just 131 years ago) that John Wesley first came to Shrewsbury with a view of rousing the inhabitants of this ancient town from their spiritual lethargy. The very graphic record of this visit is contained in his journal under the date of Monday, March 16th, and must be given in his own words. Having reached Wednesbury, he says:—"I intended to rest two or three days; but being pressed to visit Shrewsbury, and having no other time, I rode over to-day, though upon a miserable beast. When I came in, my head ached as well as my side. I found the door of the place where I was to preach surrounded by a numerous mob. But they seemed met only to stare; yet part of them came in; almost all that did (a large number) behaved quietly and seriously."

" Tuesday 17. At five (in the morning) the congregation was large, and appeared not a little affected. The difficulty now was how to get back, for I could not ride the horse on which I came. We met in the street with

one who lent me his horse, which was so easy that I grew better and better till I came to Wolverhampton."

At the time of this visit Mr. Wesley was in his 58th year, and had already accomplished, in spite of fierce persecution, an incalculable amount of good in many parts of the kingdom, yet he does not hesitate to break fresh ground. A ride of thirty miles on a "miserable beast" does not deter him. An aching head and body is a poor preparation to meet a "numerous mob," whose temper is doubtful; but courage and a sense of duty predominated, and those who entered the place behaved quietly and seriously. Tradition tells us that this place was No. 1, Fish Street, occupied for many years in later times, by Mr. Perks, tinman, who, being an ardent Methodist himself, was wont to point with pride and pleasure to his workshop as part of this identical room.

It may naturally be asked who urged Mr. Wesley to visit Shrewsbury on the occasion above mentioned, who entertained him for the night, and who lent him a better horse for his return journey? These questions may be incapable of a definite answer; yet some light can be thrown on the existence of a friendly feeling towards him by seeking for it elsewhere than in his Journal. For this purpose we must go back for some nine years, to a fact in the history of another good man, closely associated with early Methodism; who, although he has never been canonised by the Church of Rome, is canonised in the hearts of all good men who love purity of life, who admire Christian zeal, and who venerate hallowed enthusiasm for the cause of Christ. I refer to the Rev. John Fletcher, afterwards vicar of Madeley.

Four miles from Shrewsbury, on the left of the

London Road, there stands a large white stone mansion, on the border of the river Tern, surrounded by a picturesque park, the residence of the Right Hon. Lord Berwick. On the site it now occupies there formerly stood an old mansion named Tern Hall, which was the seat of a family named Hill, ancestors of Lord Berwick. In 1752, Mr. Thomas Hill, M.P. for Shrewsbury, had two sons, for whom he required a tutor. On the recommendation of a French Minister, M. Duchamp, he engaged a young man, a native of Switzerland, who had just completed his education at the University of Geneva. This was John William de la Fletcher. Mr. Hill could not have made a happier choice, and Fletcher could not have been more fortunate in finding such a home. The latter had brought with him from his native country a deep regard for religion, coupled with a highly sensitive nature. The following incident will illustrate this. A short time after his engagement, Mr. Hill, when visiting London on one occasion in discharge of his parliamentary duties, took with him his family and Mr. Fletcher, and when they stopped at St. Albans, Mr. Fletcher walked into the town and did not return till the coach had departed. A horse being left for him he rode after the family, and overtook them in the evening. Mr. Hill enquired why he stayed behind : he said, "As I walked I met with a poor old woman, who talked so sweetly of Jesus Christ, that I knew not how the time passed away." "I shall not wonder," said Mrs. Hill, "if our tutor does not turn Methodist by and by." "Methodist, Madam," said he, "pray what is that?" She replied, "Why the Methodists are a people that do nothing but pray: they are praying all day and all night." "Are they" said

he, "then, by the help of God, I will find them out, if they be above ground."

This purpose he took the earliest opportunity of carrying out; he found them, and on all occasions when in London; he attended the services, and the class meetings, and soon became a bosom friend of Mr. Wesley, and an earnest disciple of his teaching.

Fletcher necessarily spent much of his time in the country, at Tern Hall, and while there, attended the Parish Church, of Atcham. It is recorded of him that instead of returning home in the family coach, after service, he took solitary walks by the river side, during which he indulged in meditation and prayer. A pious domestic in the family of Mr. Hill (Mr. Vaughan), having frequently observed him doing this, one Sunday desired leave to walk with him, which he gladly agreed to; and from that time they continued the practice. There was also an Excise Officer living at Atcham, from whom Mr. Fletcher learned singing, and often conversed with him on religious topics; ever glad to open his mind on a subject which occupied so large a portion of his thoughts.

In 1757, Mr. Fletcher received deacon's orders at the hands of the Bishop of Bangor, in the Chapel Royal, St. James's, and priest's orders on the following Sunday. The same day that he was ordained priest he assisted Mr. Wesley in the administration of the Lord's Supper at West Street Chapel, London. His first sermon in the country was delivered in Atcham Church. The "pious domestic" above mentioned, informed Mr. Wesley, some years after, that his text on the occasion was, James iv c. 4 v., "*Ye adulterers and adulteresses,*

know ye not, that the friendship of this world is enmity against God." "The congregation" said Mr. Vaughan, "stood amazed, and gazed upon him, as if he had been a monster. But to me he appeared as a messenger sent from heaven."

As the result of such startling sermons the clergy refused to admit him into their churches. The Rev. William Gorsuch, minister of the Abbey Church, Shrewsbury, was an exception; he allowed him to preach there. Mr. Fletcher remarks in reference to this occasion : "I preached in the forenoon with some degree of the demonstration of the Spirit. The congregation was very numerous, and I believe one half at least desired to hear me again. But the minister would not let me have the pulpit any more." The next Sunday, the minister of a neighbouring parish (the Rev. John Cotton, M.A., vicar of St. Alkmund's) lying a dying, Mr. Fletcher was sent for to officiate for him, and a few days after (Dec. 26, 1757) Mr. Cotton died. The chief man in the parish offered to make interest, that Mr. Fletcher might succeed him, but he could not consent. Mr. Fletcher's engagement as tutor to Mr. Hill's sons, ceased in 1759, they having gone to Cambridge; but he remained for a time at Tern Hall. In the following year, through the kind interest of Mr. Hill, who was very tolerant towards his young friend, he was presented to the living of Madeley; where he spent the remainder of his useful life in the service of his Master.

It can hardly be doubted that the kindly reception Mr. Wesley met with on his first coming to Shrewsbury was largely due to Mr. Fletcher's occasional visits to the town during his residence at Tern Hall, and the

powerful influence of his holy life and earnest preaching on the minds and hearts of some of its inhabitants. It is necessary here to recall some of the individuals who were thus influenced, and who rejoiced in an event so important to them as the appearance of Mr. Wesley in their midst. Two of these deserve especial mention—Mrs. Bridget Glynne, and Mr. John Appleton.

This excellent and pious lady who was on intimate terms with Mr. Fletcher, and continued to correspond with him after his ordination, was the widow of Edward Glynne, Esq., of Glynne, Montgomeryshire, and daughter of Edward Lloyd, Esq., of Aberbechan Hall, in the same county. She was residing with her son and daughter in Shrewsbury, and shewed great interest in Methodism, as will be seen by future references to her in these pages, using what influence she had to protect the preachers from persecution, and keeping together the much abused members of the Society in social and religious intercourse. Her name appears in the earliest extant list of membership as a constant attendant at the society meetings. She died in 1799, having attained the great age of 81, and lies with her two children in St. Julian's church, Shrewsbury. Her daughter Bridget survived her mother, dying unmarried in 1804. Her son, Edward Glynne, Esq., also died unmarried in 1805, aged 61. A handsome mural tablet to their memory may be seen in the south aisle of the church. ⁽¹⁾

Mr. John Appleton was a currier of Shrewsbury, who, I find by the books, was admitted to the Currier's Guild in 1751. He appears to have declined the office

(1) The coat of arms on the tablet is:—Quarterly 1 and 4 Azure, a chevron between 3 cocks A. armed, and wattled O. 2 and 3 G. a lion rampant A. Crest—a cock as above.

of Steward of the Company in 1753, preferring to pay his fine of 6s. 8d. in default of serving. He was elected, however, in 1760 one of the Wardens, and the year after as one of the four "Sitters." He was again elected a Warden in 1772, and a "Sitter" in the following year. From these facts we may infer that he had the respect and esteem of his brother tradesmen; for none but those who stood high amongst them were elected to such honours. The business of a currier a hundred years ago, when none were allowed to follow it in Shrewsbury except those who were free of the Company, was a highly lucrative one, and many were the fortunes made by it. He was probably succeeded in his business by James Appleton, who is recorded as taking his freedom in the following year in the same guild; but whether he was a son, or some other relative does not appear. His admission fine was £10, which points to his not having served his apprenticeship, or if he had it was in some other town, and he was admitted as a "foreigner." The religious life of Mr. Appleton was begun under very impressive circumstances. He was staying at Bristol for a time, and while there he associated with the Methodists, of whom he highly approved; but one Sunday he happened to go to a church where a minister was to preach who had on previous occasions denounced Methodists from the pulpit, basing his remarks on the text *Having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.* He took the same text on this occasion, and inveighed violently against the novel sect, the upstart Methodists, as he called them, adding—these are the men whom St. Paul foretold in the text would come. "He then laid many grieved things to their charge, without any colour of truth, and warned his flock to

turn away from them. Shortly after, he preached at St. Nicholas' Church ; but when he had named the above text twice, he was suddenly seized with a rattling in his throat, attended with a hideous groaning, and fell backward against the door of the pulpit, burst it open, and fell down stairs. He was then carried home, and on the following Sunday died."

John Appleton being in the church was very much struck with this solemn event. "When he returned to Shrewsbury he took a house, where he fitted up a room, in which he preached for many years, as long as his health would permit, and had full congregations. He constantly preached two days in the week at seven in the evening, after labouring hard at his trade all the day, and twice on Sunday. When Mr. Wesley's preachers came to Shrewsbury about the year 1761, he took for their use a place, and fitted it up as a neat chapel, where they preached several years." This building was the Shearmen's Hall, in High street, previously used as a theatre. Before his death he built a commodious chapel in Hill's Lane, "entirely at his own expense, which was opened by Mr. Wesley, March the 27th, 1781." ⁽²⁾ He died in the full assurance of faith on Saturday, May 1st, 1784.

John Appleton's piety appears to have endeared him to Mr. Fletcher and to Mr. Wesley ; the latter came especially out of his way from Manchester to preach his funeral sermon, which was from these words:— *Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave. whither thou goest.* In alluding to this event in his journal Mr. Wesley has supplied for this man a brief but happy epitaph by designating him " Good John Appleton."

(2) *Vide* The Arminian Magazine vol. xiii (1789) p. 636.

CHAPTER II.

The leaven of Methodism—Effects on the humbler classes—Thomas Olivers—His early life—His preaching—Lord Hereford orders him to be put in the stocks—No one obeys the order—He makes restitution—Buried in John Wesley's grave.

BESIDES Mrs. Glynne and John Appleton, there were others in a humbler position in the social scale who were drawn into Christian fellowship by the all absorbing pursuit of a higher spiritual life. The leaven of Methodism had begun to work in Shrewsbury, as it had begun thirty-two years before in Oxford. Not that a new gospel was preached : it was the old gospel looked at with more serious eyes. Just as some old idea which has passed through our minds a hundred times, will, in a strange and unaccountable manner re-assert itself, lay hold of our attention, and defy every effort to dislodge it, so the familiar facts of Christ's teaching, which these people had known from their childhood, were revived in their breasts by the simple enthusiasm with which they were declared. The trammels of formality were snapped. For dull prosaic homilies there was substituted the rhetoric of passionate earnestness, which though not always symmetrical in style, was uniform in power to move the careless. Many resented this as an intrusion ; a few welcomed it as though a new revelation had been granted them.

Mr. Wesley writes in his journal after many years of his life's work had been done :—" In every place we find labouring men most susceptible of religion. Such

a blessing results from that curse, ‘In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread.’” No more striking feature of his teaching could be named, than the power it exercised over the minds of working men whose life was one continued round of monotonous labour. Carpenters from the bench, shoemakers from the stall, tailors from the shop-board, miners from the pits, labourers from the plough, were attracted to the meetings in early morning, or late in the evening, and were made to feel that Christ’s gracious message was to them as much as to the wealthy. Once enlisted in the ranks of the Redeemer, these men threw themselves with energy into the conflict, ever raging in the world between truth and error, piety and impiety. Innumerable examples could be given of such men being raised to a higher level of spiritual earnestness, and becoming in their turn teachers of their fellows. Much as there was in common between Whitefield and Wesley, the former was slow to utilise the zeal of the uneducated. He had often been deceived by his “recruits,” and became cautious in receiving them. His friend Cornelius Winter tells us that Whitefield dismissed a tailor with: “go to rag fair and buy old clothes.” Whitefield was not singular in this. The justly celebrated Robert Hall once said to a shoemaker, who would fain have become a minister by his influence, and urged on him as an argument, that he ought not to keep his talents concealed in a napkin—the smallest pocket handkerchief you have, will do sir. Had Mr. Wesley acted on these lines, the great organization we now have amongst us, associated with his name, would not have existed. One of the men he took by the hand deserves a short notice here, because of his connection with Shrewsbury and its neighbourhood, as

well as on account of his zeal, his usefulness, and his genius.

Thomas Olivers, the author of that beautiful hymn which has now become the property of the whole Christian world—

“The God of Abraham praise,
Who reigns enthroned above ;
Ancient of everlasting days,
And God of Love.”

was born in a little obscure village amongst the Montgomeryshire hills, called Treganon, in 1725. Left an orphan when only four years of age, a granduncle had the care of him, who, soon after, died, leaving him a small fortune, the interest of which was to be spent on his education till he was of age, when he would receive the principal. At eighteen years of age he was bound apprentice to a shoemaker, but was too idle and fond of company to acquire a knowledge of the trade. Sometime later he gained the affections of a farmer's daughter, whose sister became one of the wives of Sir John Pryce, of Newtown, and treated her so badly that she was nearly driven to an untimely end. The clamour of the people, and the uneasiness of his own mind, compelled him to leave the neighbourhood and come to Shrewsbury, where he remained some time. Amongst the many things he mentioned with regret in after life, was his going into the Methodist meeting while here, and, out of mere wantonness, making use of some very indecent language. Shortly afterwards he became seriously impressed about his spiritual condition; but it was not until he found his way to Bristol and heard Mr. Whitefield preach, that he became a changed man. The transformation was so sudden that a week after he

was awakened, he went to the Cathedral at six o'clock in the morning. "When the *Te Deum* was read," he tells us in his autobiography, "I felt as if I had done with earth, and was praising God before the throne ! No words can set forth the joy, the rapture, the awe and reverence I felt. At eight I went to hear Mr. Whitefield : at ten I went to Christ Church. When the invitation to the Lord's Supper, which was to be administered the next Sunday, was read, it pierced my very heart, and caused me to weep bitterly ; at the same time I determined at all events, to partake of it. I went to church again at two in the afternoon : at five I again heard Mr. Whitefield, and concluded the public worship of that day at an Anabaptist meeting. Thus, though I had spent the whole Friday before in the works of the devil ; now, partly by hearing the word, and partly by reading, meditation and abundance of private prayer, I spent the whole of this day in acts of fervent devotion."*

The genuineness of Oliver's reformation was shewn by his changed conduct. He joined the Methodist society, forsook his former companions, lived a pious life, and looked around him for opportunities of doing good to others by his council and advice. Being of age he tells us, "I set out for my own country to receive my fortune, which had lain so long in Mr. Tudor's hands. As I passed through the country, I preached in most of the societies which lay in my way ; and I believe it was not altogether in vain.

" When I got home, my old acquaintance got about me ; but when they saw such an alteration in me, they were astonished ; and the more so, as they had never seen the like before. As soon as I had received my

* Arminian Magazine, Vol. II., p. 83.

money, I bought a horse, and rode far and near, paying all I owed in my own country: this made a great noise, and confirmed the people in their opinion, that the change they saw in me was of God. My uncle Tudor, indeed, attributed it to another cause. He said, ‘thou hast been so wicked, that thou hast seen the devil; and that has occasioned so great a change in thee.’ At last my aunt Tudor and others desired me to preach the next sabbath-day; to which I consented. On Saturday I fell in company with Lord H—re—rd, [Lord Hereford], who had heard that I was turned Methodist, and was going to preach in the parish. He damned me and swore if there was a pool of water near he would throw me in: I was going to reply, but he would not suffer me. As we were going the same way, I followed at a distance; and every now and then he turned about, swearing that he would put me in the stocks and send me to prison. When he came near a pinfold, where there was a pair of stocks, I turned over a style to a neighbour’s house: on this my lord swore that if they took me in he would drive the country of them. I therefore judged it prudent to turn another way.

“The next day I went with my uncle Tudor to church and sacrament: I went with him also to evening prayers. Just as the minister was concluding, his lordship came to church. As soon as the people were got out, my lord said, ‘Mr. Tudor, why do you harbour that fellow about your house?’ My uncle answered, ‘Where should he be, my lord, but at home?’ He then desired my uncle to send me out of the parish; but my uncle said, ‘He is in his own parish, my lord, and about his own business.’ On this I stept forward. When my

lord saw me, he said ‘ Wh—wh—wh—wh—why dost thou dress like a parson ? (for I was dressed in blue). I said, ‘ What I wear, my lord, is my own, and not your lordship’s.’ He said, ‘ If thou dost not leave the country, I will send thee to the stocks.’ I answered, ‘ I regard not the stocks, my lord; your lordship may send me to Montgomery, if you please. But before I go, I must tell your lordship that I was shocked exceedingly yesterday, on hearing a person of your rank, who is also a magistrate, curse and swear as your lordship did when you saw me on the common.’ As this conversation passed in the presence of almost the whole parish, many were well pleased to hear my lord so plainly dealt with: but my lord himself was enraged exceedingly, and called for one and another to come and take me to the stocks; but several of those he called ran away. At last he said to his footman, ‘ Go you and take him away’; and then called one of his tenants, ‘ John Parry ! John Parry ! I say, John Parry, come you and take him to the stocks.’ I smiled, and said, ‘ My lord, you need not call these lusty men, for if you send a child it will do as well ; seeing I shall make no resistance.’ When we were gone a little way, the footman swore he had much rather carry his master to the devil, than me to the stocks; and Mr. Parry swore the same. I said, ‘ Pray do not curse and swear, or you will be as bad as my lord.’ But, though such a multitude of young and old were present, so universally was my lord’s conduct disapproved of, that not one of them went with us, but my aunt Tudor; nor did any one come after us, but another uncle.

“ When we came to the stocks, my aunt said, ‘ What do you now intend to do ? ’ Mr. Parry said, we must put

him in or run the country.' She said, ' You and I have lived in friendship for many years, and I shall be sorry now to hurt you. Go you therefore and ask my lord, if he will indemnify you: for if he is put in somebody shall pay for it.' Mr. Parry went, and found my lord had taken the parson and my uncle Tudor into the public house; where the parson, who had administered the sacrament that day, tarried, drinking with my lord from four in the afternoon till eleven at night ; and my uncle, who had received it, till seven the next morning. This I mention as a specimen of the religion of my native country. When Mr. Parry came to my lord, he asked, ' Have you put him in ? ' Mr. Parry answered, ' No, my lord, for I am threatened.' On this my lord jumped up, and drew his sword ; and away ran the farmer, and my lord after him, both cursing and swearing like devils. When Mr. Parry returned, my aunt asked, ' Well, what are you to do ? ' He cursed my lord, and said ' Do ! we must put him in.' The footman swore, ' I will never put him in ;' and the farmer the same. And, as I was quite passive and cheerful, my aunt said ' Thou shalt not put thyself in.' I answered, this is very hard, I am to go into the stocks, and you both swear you will not put me in, and my aunt says, I shall not put myself in. Well, then, I will tell you how it shall be : one of you shall hold up the stocks, and the other shall take hold of my leg ; and, by so doing, you shall both put me in.' After scratching their heads, they consented: accordingly, one of them lifted up the stocks, and the other put his hand under the calf of my leg, and just put it in, and then bid me take it out again : however, we stood near the stocks the whole time, which was two hours, talking about religion. Among other things, Mr. Parry said, ' It

is a pity you did not tell the people you would preach in the stocks.' I said, ' It is very true, and I am sorry I did not think of it. The next morning, through my aunt's persuasion, I rode to Montgomery to an attorney; but he not being at home, my uncle advised me to let the matter drop ; and indeed, I was easily persuaded to this, as I found so little of the spirit of resentment.

"A few years ago, Mrs. G—n, (Mrs. Glynne) of Shrewsbury, told me that Lord H. (Hereford) told her the affair ; and added, ' That if any more of them came into his parish, he would serve them in the same manner.' She said, ' My lord, you judge of this people according to the idle reports you hear of them ; but I know them to be the servants of the living God. Therefore, my lord, beware what you do to them or God will punish you one day or other.' He paused a while, and then said, ' Cousin G. if I had known this before, I would not have done what I did ; but for the time to come I will have nothing to do with them.'

" After I had paid what I owed in my own country, I went to Shrewsbury to do the same. But many in that place had quite forgot me, as well as what I owed them. Those I had defrauded by any unlucky trick, I told them of it, paid the full value, and offered them interest, if it was only for a few shillings. One instance of this was, a companion of mine had defrauded a Quaker of a shilling ; and because I was concerned in laying the scheme, I thought I ought to pay him. When I went to enquire for him, I found him in jail, and told him the whole affair. He then asked me, ' Art thou the young man who preached in the Methodist meeting, concerning whom there is so much noise ? ' I said, ' I am.' He said,

'Wilt thou come next first-day, and preach to the prisoners?' I said, 'I will.' Accordingly, I went and preached in the prison chapel, and many were glad to hear what God had done for my soul. Indeed, I found that going to a place, and paying everyone what I owed him, was frequently a means of great good: especially, as I was always careful when people thanked me, to commend the grace of God, telling them, 'you ought to thank God: for if he had not converted me, I never should have thought of paying you.'

Having given the above extracts from Thomas Oliver's entertaining autobiography relating to his connection with Shrewsbury and its neighbouring county Montgomeryshire, it is not necessary here to pursue the subject further than to say that he afterwards was taken into the confidence of Mr. Wesley, was employed on the *Arminian Magazine*, became a clever and vigorous controversialist, an excellent musician, the author of several admirable hymns, and one of the most zealous, admired, and successful preachers of the Methodist Connexion. He died in 1799, aged 74 years, and lies in the same tomb with Mr. Wesley in City Road Chapel.



CHAPTER III.

Wesley's second visit to Salop—Journey from Hereford—Preaches in Shrewsbury—Goes to Wem—Alexander Mather—Where Wesley preached in Shrewsbury—Mrs. Glynne invites Fletcher to meet Wesley—Fletcher's letter of excuse—Third visit of Wesley to Salop—Goes first to Madeley—A timely visit—Persecution of Fletcher—Wesley preaches in Shrewsbury—Improvement in the Society—Comforting a sick brother.

WE come now to the second recorded visit of Mr. Wesley to Shrewsbury. He was on his way from Chepstow, through Hereford, March 29th, 1762. He shall tell his own tale:—"I took horse (from Hereford) at six, with William Crane, and Francis Walker. The wind was piercing cold, and we had many showers of snow and rain, but the worst was, part of the road was scarcely passable; so that at Church Stretton one of our horses lay down, and would go no farther; however, William Crane and I pushed on, and before seven reached Shrewsbury. A large company quickly gathered together, many of them were wild enough, but the far greater part were calm and attentive, and came again at five in the morning." Let us not too hastily dismiss this short record, lest we fail to appreciate the facts. Here is a ride of 51 miles along an infamous road, in the face of a piercing north wind, accompanied with rain and snow: the day is closed with a public service: at five o'clock next morning—a dark and cold March morning—this holy man with unabated energy is teaching the earnest people who have gathered round him to look up through the

darkness and misery of their present life to a brighter home, and to a happier state! Such zeal and devotion are rare. The figment of Apostolic succession fades into nothing in the presence of these real Apostolic endowments.

Mr. Wesley arranged to leave Shrewsbury on the following morning on horseback for Wem, but Mrs. Glynne, with womanly kindness, would not allow of his being exposed to the bitter weather prevailing at the time, and insisted that she should take him in her carriage ; he consented, and the journey was not without adventure.

“ Wednesday, March 30. Having been invited to preach at Wem, Mrs. Glynne desired she might take me thither in a post-chaise ; but in little more than an hour we were fast enough ; however, the horses pulled till the traces broke. I should then have walked on had I been alone, though the mud was deep, and the snow drove impetuously ; but I could not leave my friend : so I waited patiently till the man had made shift to mend the traces, and the horses pulled amain ; so that with much ado, not long after the time appointed, I came to Wem. I came, but the person who invited me was gone ; gone out of town about four in the morning, and I could find no one who seemed either to expect or desire my company. I enquired after the place where Mr. Mather preached ; but it was filled with hemp. It remained only to go into the Market-house ; but neither any man woman or child cared to follow us, the north wind roared so loud on every side, and poured in from every side ; however, before I had done singing, two or three crept in, and after them, two or three hundred ; and the

power of God was so present among them, that I believe many forgot the storm."

The Mr. Mather referred to as having preceded him at Wem, I take to be Alexander Mather, one of Mr. Wesley's most trusted and laborious lay preachers, whose self-denial and devotedness are strikingly set forth in the following extract from the "History of City Road Chapel." (p. 259.) "One of the stewards at the Foundry (the first place of worship opened by Wesley for preaching in London) was a baker, named Marriott, who was received on trial on the first list of members ever prepared. One of his assistants had been converted at the Foundry, and he had shown such talents as a local preacher, that his friends urged him to itinerate. He offered, and was accepted, but having a wife, and there being no provision made at that time for preacher's wives, this young man, Alexander Mather by name, had to return to his business. At the Conference of 1757, his case again came up for consideration, and being asked what provision would be sufficient for his wife, he replied "Four shillings a week;" and arrangements were made for the payment of that sum, and he was appointed to the Epworth circuit, to which place he walked, one hundred and fifty miles."

The actual scene of Mr. Wesley's first appearance before a Shrewsbury audience is supposed to have been the old house in Fish Street, the authority for which is tradition only; but on the occasion of his second visit we are dependent upon more reliable authority for fixing the place. At the upper end of High Street there has stood for some centuries a red sandstone building, the date of the foundation of which none of the historians of Shrewsbury have been able to fix. It

originally belonged to the guild of Shearmen, or cloth-workers, a fraternity formed not later than the 17th year of the reign of Edward IV., which subsequently developed into one of the wealthiest of the Shrewsbury trade guilds. When their trade decayed and the hall was of no further use to them, it was leased for 99 years as a theatre, and in 1761 John Appleton rented it and fitted it up as a Methodist preaching house, for which it was not ill adapted in regard to size and style of architecture. "At the west end which fronts the street, was a handsome pointed window, in the style of the 14th century, divided by a single mullion, and the top of the gable was surmounted by a flowered cross."* The front was afterwards altered to adapt it to a grocers shop, and thereby much disfigured. In this building Mr. Wesley preached on the occasion of his second and subsequent visits to Shrewsbury till 1781, a period of twenty years; and it cannot but be a matter of deep regret that while I am writing these lines this highly interesting old building, so characteristic of ancient times, and so intimately associated with early Methodism in Shrewsbury, is in course of demolition.

Mrs. Glynne sent a pressing invitation to Mr. Wesley to visit Shrewsbury in 1763, and invited Mr. Fletcher to meet him, but circumstances occurred to prevent the visit, Mr. Fletcher being called away from Shropshire on other affairs, and Mr. Wesley probably preferring to put off his visit till his friend was at home. In his letter answering Mrs. Glynne's invitation, which invitation was accompanied by the present of a book, Mr. Fletcher says,

* "Some Account of the Ancient and Present State of Shrewsbury," p. 465.

"Dear Madam,"¹⁾

Madeley, Sept. 2, 1763.

I thank you for your kind remembrance, and good wishes that I might eat the everlasting bread of our Father's house, expressed by a present of the most incorruptible bread our earth affords. I should be glad to take the opportunity of Mr. Wesley's stay at Salop to thank you in person, and eat with you the bread—the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, handed out by him; but I am obliged to set out to-day for Lady Huntingdon's College, and shall not, I fear, be in Shropshire when Mr. Wesley comes.

* * * * *

I return you my most affectionate thanks, Madam, for your book, and for the franks⁽²⁾ you added to it. May you use all the promises of the gospel as franks from Jesus, to send momentary petitions to heaven, and may an unwearied faith be the diligent messenger!

* * * * *

Mr. M. said your portmanteau would go to day; but whether it goes or stays, let neither wind nor tide keep us back from Jesus Christ. That His love may fill our hearts, is the repeated wish of, Dear Madam, your unworthy friend and servant in Christ.

J. F."

The following year circumstances favoured the design of Mrs. Glynne to bring the two remarkable men under her hospitable roof. The Journal records the visit to Madeley and Shrewsbury as follows:—

" 1764. Sat. 21 July. I rode from Bilbrook, near Wolverhampton and preached between two and three. Thence we went on to Madeley, an exceedingly pleasant village, encompassed with trees and hills. It was a great comfort to me to converse once more with a Methodist of the old stamp, denying himself, taking up his cross, and resolved to be 'altogether a Christian.' "

(1) Arminian, Mag, 1795, p. 150.

(2) The postage of letters was so expensive in those days that "franks" were much sought after from members of Parliament who were empowered to give them to their friends.

"Sun. 22nd. At ten Mr. Fletcher read Prayers, and I preached on those words in the Gospel, 'I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep.' The church would nothing near contain the congregation; but a window near the pulpit being taken down, those who could not come in stood in the church-yard, and I believe all could hear. The congregation, they said, used to be much smaller in the afternoon than in the morning; but I could not discern the least difference, either in number or seriousness."

"I found employment enough for the intermediate hours, in praying with various companies who hung about the house, insatiably hungering and thirsting after the good word. Mr. Grinshaw, at his first coming to Haworth, had not such a prospect as this. There are many adversaries indeed; but yet they cannot shut the open and effectual door."

"Mon. 23. The church was pretty well filled even at five, and many stood in the churchyard. In the evening I preached at Shrewsbury, to a large congregation, among whom were several men of fortune. I trust, though hitherto we seem to have been ploughing on the sand, there will at last be some fruit. The next day I spent at Shrewsbury."

This visit to Madeley was well timed, for at no period of the good vicar's residence there was he in greater need of encouragement under severe and trying persecution. The stern fidelity with which he reprobated all forms of ungodliness, and the high standard of spiritual life he enforced, had brought down upon him the enmity of most of the *baser sort*, and not a few also of the higher classes in the neighbourhood. A year be-

fore this date the Archdeacon on the occasion of his Visitation had preached a sermon aimed unmistakably at his Methodism, and many of the parishioners anticipated he would be stripped of his gown when he went to Ludlow. An influential local magistrate called him a Jesuit, and menaced him with a cane; and a young clergyman living at Madeley Wood, openly declared war against him, and posted on the church door a paper charging him with rebellion, schism, and with being a disturber of the peace. This same young zealot put himself at the head of the gentlemen in the parish, and, supported by the Recorder of Wenlock, was determined to put in force the Conventicle Act against him. Mr. Fletcher writing to his intimate and dear friend, Mr. Charles Wesley says: "A few weeks ago, the widow who lived in the Rock Church [a small house in which a company of people assembled for hearing the word and prayer], and a young man, who read and prayed in my absence, were taken up. I attended them before the justice, and the young clergyman with his troop were present. They called me a Jesuit, &c., and the Justice tried to frighten me, by saying, 'that he would put the Act in force, though we should assemble only in my house.' I pleaded my cause as well as I could, but seeing he was determined to hear no reason, I told him, 'he must do as he pleased, and that if the Act in question concerned us, we were ready to suffer all its rigours.' In his rage he went next day to Wenlock, and proposed to grant a warrant to have me apprehended; but as the other Justices were of opinion that the business did not come under their cognizance, but belonged to the Spiritual Courts, he was obliged to swallow his spittle alone."

What must have been the pleasure of this persecuted man to have under his roof, and in his pulpit, so sympathetic and venerated a friend as John Wesley!

The condition of Methodism in Shrewsbury appears to have been discouraging. Dependent chiefly on lay preaching, against which there existed the bitterest prejudice, with only occasional visits from Mr. Wesley, little progress appears to have been made in strengthening and enlarging the small church worshipping at Shearmen's Hall. Coming to Shrewsbury under the auspices of Mrs. Glynne, who had doubtless invited many of her more serious friends to hear Mr. Wesley for themselves, may account for the largeness and respectability of his congregation. The aspect of things made him more hopeful that he and his assistants had not been altogether "ploughing on the sand," and that there might "at last be some fruit."

These anticipations were destined to be realized, for in the following year (1765), the minutes of Conference mention Salop as one of the circuits into which England was divided for ecclesiastical purposes. The two preachers assigned to this circuit were Alexander Mather, of whom we have already spoken, and William Minethorpe; and the number of persons in church fellowship the following year (1766), were 587. There is no existing record of the towns and villages comprised in the circuit, but we may safely assume that Madeley, Ironbridge, Broseley, Bridgnorth, Whitchurch and Wellington, were included.

Of William Minethorpe, the coadjutor of Alexander Mather, we know little more than that when the minutes of Conference were printed in 1765, after a cessation of

sixteen years, he was at that time a fully accredited Travelling Preacher; and that after being appointed to Oxford, Norwich, Dunbar, and Derbyshire, his name ceases to appear in the Minutes of 1770 without any remark. One fact may be told of him. He was once the bearer of a consolitary letter to a brother minister of a curious and amusing character. John Furz, one of Mr. Wesley's preachers, was seized with a severe illness, and none about him expected he would recover. When to all appearance near death, Thomas Olivers sent Minethorpe with a letter to him—of brotherly condolence, to cheer up his spirits, and encourage him to hope for a speedy recovery, the reader might suppose ; not at all—it was to tell him that he, Olivers, would "come and preach his funeral sermon and rejoice over him." ! John Furz lived to tell the tale, and survived Olivers one year, both dying old men.



CHAPTER IV.

Shrewsbury dependent upon occasional helpers—Captain Scott, a Shropshire man—His military services—Becomes religious—Commences to preach in his regimentals—His letters to Mr. Wesley—Visits Madeley—Adventure in a Stage Coach—Sells his Commission—Enters the ministry in Lady Huntington's Connexion—Thomas Taylor, one of Mr. Wesley's helpers—Visits Shrewsbury—Preaches in the Market Square and Quarry—Mobbed by the people—His *In Memoriam* by James Montgomery.

WE now come to an interval of four years, during which Mr. Wesley's Journal is silent regarding Shrewsbury; and what is more remarkable, we do not find the name of the town in the Minutes of Conference. One of the results of this would be that the Society at Shrewsbury would receive but occasional visits from the Travelling Preachers, and would be more dependent on local men like John Appleton, or occasional visitors of the same class of workers from the adjoining circuits.

A very imperfect idea of these times can be formed without keeping fully before our minds the far-reaching effects of Wesley's and Whitefield's preaching throughout the kingdom, there being hardly a parish in which there were not some individuals who had been brought under its powerful influence, and like the sunlight upon plants, wherever it fell it quickened into life the receptive faculty, only to develop more vigour in the capacity of imparting their gains to others. Many excellent laymen whose education and knowledge fitted them for doing a good work amongst the humbler classes, and who, while not throwing off their allegiance to the Church of England, prompted by a newly awakened zeal,

deemed it to be their solemn duty to exhort to a better life the careless and the ungodly. A room in a private house, a country cottage, a barn, or the road side, was often the scene of their labours—labours which were eminently blessed by God. One of these gentleman who was connected with the immediate neighbourhood of Shrewsbury, is descrving of notice for the services he rendered to Methodism.

Captain Jonathan Scott, the son of Richard Scott, Esq., of Betton Strange, near Shrewsbury, was of an ancient and highly respectable family, who having received a polite education, entered the army at the early age of seventeen : he became a cornet in the 7th Dragoon Guards, and was afterwards promoted to the rank of captain. In the famous battle fought near Minden (Prussia), in 1759, between the French army, under the command of the Duke de Broglie, and the Prussians and English under Prince Ferdinand, in which the latter were victorious, Captain Scott served in the cavalry of the right wing, commanded by Lord George Sackville. The attack was made by the French, 60,000 strong, but was defeated with a loss of 10,000 men and thirty pieces of artillery, by the allies, whose combined forces were only 35,000 men.

The terrible incidents of this battle made a deep and lasting impression on the mind of Captain Scott, disposing him to much serious reflection on the subject of religion. He began the practice of reading the psalms and lessons for the day, which practice brought cn him the good natured banter of his brother officers, who jeeringly enquired, ‘ Well Scott, have you read your psalms and lessons to-day ?’ But his religious tendencies were

much too strong to be laughed down. "Happening to be quartered somewhere in the neighbourhood of Oathall, and being out on a shooting party, he was driven by a storm for cover to the house of a farmer, with whom some horses of the regiment were at grass. There he found several labourers who had taken shelter in the same cottage. The farmer being a pious man, and Captain Scott happening at this time to be in one of his 'religious fits,' as he was accustomed to call his periods of good resolution, he entered into conversation, and heard him speak on divine subjects in a way that astonished him. This naturally produced the enquiry, where they had collected their information, and the sentiments they expressed. They told him at the hall yonder, where there was now a very famous man, a Mr. Romaine, preaching for Lady Huntingdon, and they importunately invited him to come and hear for himself. This he determined to do the following Sunday. Thither he accordingly repaired; and he was particularly struck with the neatness and solemnity which pervaded the congregation, as well as with the impressive manner in which the service was conducted. Mr. Romaine preached on our Lord's words, in John xiv., 6, '*I am the way.*' The truth then delivered was exactly suited to the case of Captain Scott; and God, who in his good providence had brought him to hear it, by the power of his grace, made it effectual to the everlasting benefit of his soul."⁽¹⁾

He now commenced to preach, his addresses being distinguished by great fervour and fluency, and as he was in the practice of preaching in uniform, great numbers flocked to hear him. Mr. Fletcher writing to

(1) *Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon*, I, p.p. 317, 8.

Lady Huntingdon says :—" I went last Monday to meet Captain Scott, one of the fruits that have grown for the Lord at Oathall—a captain of the truth—a bold soldier of Jesus Christ. God hath thrown down before him the middle wall of bigotry, and he boldly launches into an irregular usefulness. For some months he has exhorted his dragoons daily; for some weeks he hath preached publicly at Leicester, in the Methodist Meeting House, in his regiments, to numerous congregations, with good success. The stiff regular ones pursue him with hue and cry, but I believe this *red coat* will shame many a black one. I am sure he shames me." In another letter he says :—" Captain Scott set out last Monday, for York, after making a great stir for good in Shrewsbury—he hath been a prophet to several in his own country." Mr. Whitefield gave some account of him in the Tabernacle pulpit, and said :—" I have invited the Captain to come to London, and bring his artillery to Tabernacle rampart, and try what execution he can do here." For twenty years he continued at intervals to preach as a supply in that chapel.

While he was stationed with his regiment at Northampton, he wrote the following letter to Mr. Wesley, which reveals the true spirit of the man :—

Northampton, Aug. 24th, 1766.

Reverend Sir,

The Lord has already begun to fulfil his promise here; viz. That His word shall accomplish that for which it is sent. The consciences of several begin to be alarmed; the children of God that were getting lifeless, are roused to action; and the more lively Believers seem to exert all their faith, grace, and prayer to God, that his salvation may be known to all. And in part, we have already experienced that he is working wonderfully amongst us; for he has made our very enemies to be at peace with us; all denominations

flock to hear the word, their hearts seem united together in praisinsg God, and all distinction and party seem forgot.

The desire of the people to hear the Gospel from Mr. B., was so great, that they could not bear to part with him till after Sunday; and to the above I must add my poor tribute of praise to God, for sending him here, as the Lord has blessed him exceedingly to my soul.

The zeal you have for the cause of God, and your tender love to poor perishing souls, will induce you to contrive that Mr. B. may return here soon and stay some time with us, or else come again as often as he can.

I must beg, dear Sir, you will remember me always at the Throne of grace, as the Lord seems to be considerably at work in the regiment to which I belong, I must entreat you and your societies to make mention of us in your prayers, that the Lord would call many to serve as faithful soldiers under the banner of the Captain of our salvation.

May God be with you, to bless you! so prays, Rev. Sir, your unworthy brother in Christ,

J. SCOTT.

A short time after he was removed to Leicester, whence he wrote again to Mr. Wesley.

Leicester, October 15th, 1766.

Reverend Sir,

Mr. B. came to Northampton on Friday, the third instant, and was affectionately received. Each time he preached he had many to hear him. On Sunday evening he changed with Mr. G. who had near two thousand hearers. There was each time the greatest decency and respect shewn, everybody listening as if they came with a view to benefit their souls.

On Monday, I was ordered to this place with part of the Regiment. As soon as it was known at Northampton, some persons came to me under great concern, fearing it would cause the preacher to go away, for want of a place to preach in. They added, rather than that should be the case, they were willing to contribute something towards getting one. But as long as our Regiment stays

at Northampton, this will be unnecessary, as we can contrive to let them have our Riding-house. The persons that came to me hope you will continue to send them a preacher. Indeed, from the great eagerness of the people to hear, and their earnestness to have a preacher come amongst them, there seems to be a prospect of much good being done. The harvest seems to be truly plenteous; and many souls are praying for labourers to be sent amongst them.

I therefore trust you will take this affair into serious consideration, and send another preacher into the Bedford circuit, who can take Northampton and two or three other villages in, that I know would receive you.

I feel a very earnest desire that you contrive to do this. The Lord has opened you a door in Northampton at last, and will perhaps condescend to make us unworthy creatures instruments of assisting you. I therefore wish you were well established there, before we leave the place.

As persons of all ranks go to hear, I hope you will send a preacher that will be acceptable to them. As the work is in its infancy, were they to have one they did not like, perhaps it might cool that ardent desire that seems to be amongst them. Mr. B. has found great favour with all. But I humbly submit this to your better judgment, and pray that the Lord may direct you, both in this and all other things, to act as is most consistent with His own glory, and the good of immortal souls.

May grace and peace be multiplied unto you ! So prays,

Reverend Sir,

Your affectionate and unworthy brother,(1)

J. SCOTT.

The religious zeal, impassioned eloquence, and single-hearted sincerity of Captain Jonathan Scott attracted much attention and accomplished great good, not only in his native county, but wherever he went. Many of his own class in society were participating in the general awakening to the juster conception of christianity inculcated by Methodism, and they rejoiced in his friendship. When the Countess of Huntingdon, Lady Anne

(I) Arminian Magazine, May, 1782.

Erskine, and other distinguished people visited Sir Rowland Hill, at his beautiful seat, Hawkstone, Captain Scott was one of the party; and he accompanied them afterwards to Madeley to see the Rev. John Fletcher, at whose special request he preached to large congregations from the good vicar's horseblock. Mr. Fletcher in a letter to Mr. Whitefield refers to it thus:—"Last Sunday, seven-night Captain Scott preached to my congregation in a sermon which was more blessed, though preached only upon my horse-block, than a hundred of those I preach in the pulpit. I invited him to come and treat her ladyship next Sunday with another, now the place is consecrated. If you should ever favour Shropshire with your presence, you shall have the captain's or the parson's pulpit at your option."⁽¹⁾

It was the fashion of men of the world, and, indeed, of many men who would have indignantly disclaimed this designation to treat such religious enthusiasm as that displayed by Capt. Scott as a species of lunacy. On one occasion he was coming from London by the mail coach to Shrewsbury, when a certain Major was his fellow passenger, with whom he entered into conversation about Salopians, and found that the Major knew the Scotts of Betton. Captain Scott professed himself to have formerly had some acquaintance with the family, and questioned the Major as to his particular knowledge of its members, expecting to hear some allusion to himself, but was not gratified in this. Pressing the Major to tell him if he knew of any other branches of the family he answered, "There was one mad fellow who many years ago was in the army,

(1) Life and Times of the Countess of Huntingdon, vol. 1, p. 289.

and when he was there turned a Methodist, and went about preaching with the regiment." Captain Scott asked him if he had shown any other marks of derangement besides those he had mentioned. The Major replied : he could not say, as he knew very little about him. Arriving at Oxford the mail coach stopped for a short time. When they entered the hotel room which was lighted by two large candles, Captain Scott took one of the candle in each hand, walked with a firm step up to the Major, bowed to him and said, " Give me leave, sir, to introduce to you the mad Captain Scott." The Major was overwhelmed with surprise and confusion, and seemed much hurt at what had passed, which Captain Scott seeing assured him he had not felt the least hurt at anything he had said ; but made one request, that as he was going to Shropshire, and would probably meet with many of his friends, he would correct their mistaken notion that he was deranged.

Captain Scott at length sold his commission in the army, became a minister of the gospel in 1769, and having made the acquaintance of the Viscountess Glenorchy, whose religious views were in harmony with his own, was requested by her to become her almoner, to which he consented, and erected on her behalf numerous chapels in the counties of Salop, Derby, Stafford and Cheshire. Captain Scott was twice married but left no issue. He died at Matlock in 1807.

Returning to the year 1767, we do not find Salop mentioned by name in the *Minutes of Conference*, and as the society appeared the previous year in that record as having petitioned for financial help and was granted £4, it was probably in a very low condition. It was doubt-

less with a view of re-kindling the languishing fire that Thomas Taylor paid a visit to Shrewsbury at this time, being stationed in the Cheshire circuit, of which Shrewsbury must have formed a part.

Thomas Taylor was a Yorkshireman, son of a tanner in Rothwell, and left an orphan when six years of age, under the care of a step-mother, who treated him as if he had been her own child. When he was seventeen he heard the eminent Mr. Whitefield, whose discourse left a deep impression on his imaginative and sensitive mind, but effected no permanent change. His autobiography forms one of the most curious and interesting chapters in the early history of Methodism, as exhibiting how one of the roughest blocks from the quarry of nature was chiselled by divine providence and grace into a preacher of apostolic type. After his conversion he threw himself into the work of preaching with all the enthusiasm and energy of his impulsive nature; no opposition arrested and no persecution daunted him. An interview with Mr. Wesley in 1761, at which that good man received him "with the affability and condescension for which he was so remarkable," determined the current of his after life, and he became a Methodist preacher. The account he gives of his visit to Shrewsbury in 1767 will be read with much interest:—

"Before the end of the year, I preached on Sunday morning in the market-place at Salop, and met with no other molestation than a few clods and small stones. I gave notice that I would preach again in the evening, at a place called the Quarry. 'We will be ready for you,' said the people, and so they were; for when I drew near the place, there was a little army gathered together with

clubs. They did not stay till I came to the place, but came on furiously, so that I was soon hemmed in on every side. They seemed a little at a stand when I demanded to know what they wanted. However, they rallied, and though they did not strike me, they kicked me about to some purpose. By degrees they hurried me into the town, up to the door of a house which belonged to a justice of the peace. I thought there might be something providential in this, and took the liberty of going in to desire his protection. The justice was at the coffee-house; but I sent for him. The mob by this time had filled the street, and were roaring like lions. At length the justice came. He said, 'Tell me who have hurt you; and I will send for a warrant for them,' and after a little incoherent talk fairly shoved me out of doors into the midst of the mob. Providence held them from striking, or a very few blows might have ended the business. I likewise kept on my feet, for if I had once been down, there was no likelihood that I should have risen again. But I was covered with dirt from head to foot. All the filth they could scrape up was thrown, and when I attempted to turn my face on one side, I met it on the other. Which way to go I knew not; nor indeed could I go anyway, but just as my masters drove me. At length I heard some cry out, 'For shame, for shame.' This occasioned a quarrel among themselves. Meanwhile an honest man opened his door, so I slipped in, and went out by a back way, not much hurt, but dreadfully bedaubed; so that I really 'needed much washing to be touched.' "(2)

This was but one of the many rough receptions that Thomas Taylor received in his varied travels, though it is the only one recorded of Shrewsbury. After fifty-six years' devotion to the service of his Divine Master, he died at Birch House, near Bolton, Lancashire, October 15th, 1816, aged almost 80 years. The well-known poet James Montgomery wrote his *In Memoriam*, with the first and last verses of which we close this brief notice :—

“Servant of God ! well done,
Rest from thy loved employ ;
The battle's fought, the victory won,
Enter thy Master's joy.
The voice of midnight came,
He started up to hear ;
A mortal arrow pierced his frame
He fell,—but felt no fear.
The pains of death are past,
Labour and sorrow cease ;
And life's long warfare closed at last,
His soul is found in peace.
Soldier of Christ, well done !
Begin thy new employ,
Sing, while eternal ages run,
Thy master and His Joy.”

CHAPTER V.

Seat of the Hills in Shropshire—Methodism enters the family—Mr. Richard Hill consults Mr. Fletcher about religion—Beneficial result—Seeks the religious good of others—Miss Jane Hill—Mr. Rowland Hill—Formality of the Established Church—Mr. Stillingfleet refused the Parish Church—Afterwards presented to Shawbury—Hawkstone a centre of religious life—Mr. Wesley again visits Salop—A serious charge against his preachers refuted—He is rejected by the Church—Madeley and Fletcher—Shrewsbury—Thomas Hill's letter to Mr. Wesley.

“**H**AWKSTONE PARK, the magnificent seat of Viscount Hill, is delightfully situated in a park of great extent and picturesque beauty, not far from the turnpike road leading from Shrewsbury to Whitchurch, and has long been an alluring object to the admirers of nature, as well as to persons of taste and curiosity.” Such is the language of a gazetteer published forty years ago, in speaking of the seat of the old Shropshire family of the Hill's; and no one who has seen the place will call in question the justness of the description. In addition to the great natural beauties giving attraction to the place, there are the crumbling ruins of the old baronial castle of the Audleys on land bestowed upon John de Audley by William the Conqueror; and not far distant the still older remains of a magnificent Roman camp the Bury Walls, possibly coeval with Christianity itself, crowning the height of a sandstone cliff. But it is not with the natural or archaeological features of Hawkstone we have to do here, but with the interesting fact that about the time of which we write, Methodism had found its way into the hearts of several members of the family residing at the mansion.

While Mr. Fletcher was still a tutor to the sons of Mr. Hill of Tern Hall, in 1757, he received in the autumn of that year a letter from an anonymous person expressing a deep and anxious concern regarding his spiritual condition. It was written by one evidently in keen distress, who wanted someone to afford him light and help in his religious despondency, and urgently begging Mr. Fletcher to meet him that very night in Shrewsbury at a certain inn mentioned in the letter. Fletcher's heart was touched by the earnestness of the appeal, and the distance being only four miles, he walked into Shrewsbury to meet his unknown interviewer. It was no other than a relative of his pupils, young Richard Hill of Hawkstone, then about twenty-five years of age, the eldest son Sir Rowland Hill, Bart., whose title and estates he succeeded to in 1783. Mr. Richard Hill from a boy had thought much on the subject of a future life, and the necessity of devoting himself to the service of his Saviour, though he appears to have had but vague notions of the true way of finding peace. These reflections were not extinguished by five years of school life at Westminster, nor by his university career at Magdalen College, Oxford; nor yet by his *grand tour* of Europe, which occupied two years. He had just returned to England bearing the same troubled conscience, and longing for rest of mind. The details of the interview with Mr. Fletcher are wanting; all we know being that Mr. Fletcher "consoled him by advice, engaged with him in prayer, and left him in a state of comparative ease."

Shortly afterwards, partly by reading certain books, and partly by attending the preaching of Mr. Romaine, Mr. Richard Hill, while in London, was brought into a

calm and peaceful state of mind, and religion became in him henceforth an abiding principle. In consequence of this happy change he desired to impart the result of his experience to others, especially to those of his own family, some of whom became through his example as devoted to God as himself. His sister, Miss Jane Hill, a lady of strong intellect, great piety, and numerous accomplishments, afterwards the intimate friend and correspondent of the Countess of Huntingdon, John Wesley, John Fletcher, The Viscountess Glenorchy, and others of Methodistic leanings, owed much to his Christian influence, and fully sympathised in all his good works. Nor can we omit to mention the power for good he exercised over his young brother Rowland, who afterwards became one of the most zealous, popular, but eccentric preachers of his day, whose conversion was mainly brought about by the religious council of Richard and Miss Jane Hill. Mr. Richard Hill engaged in lay-preaching with considerable zeal. He gathered the domestics of his father's establishment together for religious teaching and devotion, earnestly exhorting them to a devout life, not without success. In a little book, preserved amongst the papers of the Rev. Rowland Hill, in the hand-writing of Richard, there are frequent entries of the happy deaths of their converts and friends. One runs thus:—Feb. 6, 1766. “This day, being Thursday, about a quarter-past twelve at noon, my dear, humble, faithful servant, Giles Archer, sweetly fell asleep in Jesus. His disorder was a fever which lasted exactly

thrce weeks.—The Lord enable me to follow him as he followed Christ.”⁽¹⁾

Mr. Hill also began to expound the Word of God for the edification of his neighbours, in the vestry of Hodnet Church, and did much to promote the cause of evangelical truth. The frigid formality of the Church of England, at the time of which we speak, afforded little help or encouragement to an earnest and enthusiastic Christian, and to make matters worse the Methodist movement which tended to break up the frozen placidity of church life, if life it could be called, had roused the anger of the clergy to that degree that many of them became the leaders in a campaign of persecution against the members of their own community, who sympathised with it, which was as insensate as it was futile.

In 1766 a clergyman, Mr. Stillingfleet, a Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, who had imbibed the spirit of the new *cult*, was on a visit with Mr. Richard Hill at Hawkstone, when the latter, being desirous that his friend should preach in the parish church, wrote a civil letter to the minister requesting him to lend his pulpit on the following Sunday to his intimate friend, who he explained, was a gentleman firmly attached to the articles, homilies and liturgy of the Church of England, and of an unexceptionable character; but to such a height did prejudice run, that the minister absolutely refused, concluding that because Mr. Stillingfleet was recommended by Mr. Hill, he must be an enthusiast, or, in other words, a Methodist, and therefore he would not suffer the ears of his congregation to be “infected with erroneous and

(1) Sidney's Life of the Rev. Rowland Hill, p. 23.

delusive doctrine." As the pulpit of the parish church was refused to Mr. Stillingfleet, Sir Rowland Hill, with the greatest kindness and candour, told his son that his friend should be welcome to preach in the chapel,^[1] an offer which Mr. Hill accepted with thankfulness. Two years after this event, Mr. Stillingfleet, through the influence of Mr. Richard Hill, was presented to the living of Shawbury, eight miles north of Shrewsbury.^[2]

Hawkstone became the meeting place, during the life-time of Mr., afterwards Sir, Richard Hill, of many distinguished persons remarkable for their devotion to the cause of God. It was here Lady Glenorchy made the acquaintance of Miss Jane Hill, who became the religious counsellor and guide of that beautiful, sensitive, sincere, but desponding and ill-fated woman. The sensible and spiritually minded letters written by Miss Hill to this child of affliction, are among the best of their kind to be found in our literature. Sugal, in Staffordshire, the seat of Lord Glenorchy at that time, is but a short distance from Hawkstone, near the eastern boundary of Shropshire, and the interchange of visits between the families was frequent. It was here Captain Scott was introduced to Lady Glenorchy at her special request, by Miss Hill; here Howell Harris, the eloquent Welsh preacher, was entertained, also Mr. Romaine, Mr. Venn, and others of a like reputation for their zealous activity; besides a large number of the aristocracy who had been more or less influenced by the preaching of Wesley, Whietfield, and Fletcher.

(1) It is not stated what parish church is referred to, but if this chapel was Weston-under-Redcastle in which Mr. Stillingfleet was allowed to preach, it would be Hodnet Parish Church, to which this was a Chapel of Ease.

(2) Life of Lady Huntingdon, II, p. 39.

Sir Richard Hill was for many years member of parliament for Shropshire, author of a well-known tract *Pietas Oxoniensis*, on the expulsion of six young men from the University of Oxford for holding religious meetings in private houses, praying extempore, and other frivolous charges. The tract called forth considerable correspondence at the time. He also took an earnest part in the Calvinistic controversy that tended so much to divide the ranks of the Methodists, and for a time to cool their regard for each other : he siding with the Calvinists.

While the influence which Methodism exercised on the life of Sir Richard Hill was one of the most conspicuous examples of its remarkable power that occurred in Shropshire, it was by no means the only one, as will appear in the progress of our narrative.

In July, 1768, Mr. Wesley visited Madeley and Shrewsbury. He was on his way from Yorkshire in his annual visit to his societies, most of which he had seen. On the 14th he crossed over into Lincolnshire, and after spending about ten days there, returned by Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield, and thence passed on to Madeley. While on his way he had been confronted by a serious charge against his preachers, which evidently gave him much concern, the nature of which will best appear from a letter he wrote in answer to it, part of which we reproduce :—

Swinfleet, July 19th, 1768.

Revd. and dear Sir,

" One of Wintringham informed me yesterday, that you said, no sensible and well-meaning man could hear, and much less join, the Methodists ; because they all *acted under a lie*, professing themselves members of the Church of England, while they licensed themselves as Dissenters. You are a little mis-informed. The greater part

of the Methodist Preachers are not licensed at all ; and several that are, are not licensed as Dissenters. I instance particularly in Thomas Adams and Thomas Brisco. When Thomas Adams desired a license, one of the justices said, ‘ Mr. Adams, are not you of the Church of England ? Why then do you desire a license ? ’ He answered, ‘ Sir, I am of the Church of England ; yet I desire a license, that I may legally defend myself from illegal violence of oppressive men.’ T. Brisco being asked the same question, in London, and the Justice adding, ‘ We will not grant you a license,’ his lawyer replied, ‘ Gentlemen, you cannot refuse it : the act is a mandatory one. You have no choice.’ One asked the Chairman, ‘ Is this true ? ’ He shook his head, and said, ‘ He is in the right.’ The objection therefore, does not lie at all against the greater part of the Methodist Preachers ; because they are either licensed in this form, or not licensed at all.

“ When others applied for a license, the Clerk or Justice said ‘ I will not license you, but as Protestant Dissenters.’ They replied, ‘ We are of the Church ; we are not Dissenters : but if you will call us so, we cannot help it.’ They did *call* them so in their certificates, but this did not *make* them so. They still *call themselves* members of the Church of England ; and they believe themselves so to be. Therefore neither do these act under a lie. They speak no more than they verily believe. Surely then, unless there are stronger objections than this, both well-meaning and sensible men may, in perfect consistence with their sense and sincerity, not only hear, but join the Methodists.

“ We are in truth so far from being enemies to the church, that we are rather bigots to it. I dare not, like Mr. Venn, leave the parish church where I am, to go to an Independent meeting. I dare not advise others to go thither, rather than to church. I advise all, over whom I have any influence, steadily to keep to the Church. Meantime, I advise them to see that the kingdom of God is within them ; that their hearts be full of love to God and man ; and to look upon all, of whatever opinion, who are like-minded, as their ‘ brother and sister, and mother.’

Your affectionate brother,

JOHN WESLEY.” (1)

(1) “Wesley’s Journal.”

This was a conclusive answer to the charge of dishonesty laid against such of the Methodist Preachers as were compelled by the Justices to accept a license in a form which designated them by an incorrect name, a name they disclaimed. But it also reveals in a few words the untenable attitude taken up by Mr. Wesley, and which he also expected his preachers and people to take up, with regard to the Established Church, an attitude which involved him in continual difficulties. While departing from the then recognised discipline of the Church by preaching in unconsecrated buildings and the open air, by organising a band of unordained preachers, and establishing societies for social prayer and Christian fellowship up and down the land, he yet claimed to be a member of the Church of England. Sir Richard Hill and others in Shropshire made the same claim, but the prevailing voice of the Church repudiated them. They were counted schismatics, and their deeply rooted love for the church of their fathers was discredited. The trouble this caused Wesley is evident in the above letter, for he could not see, what his followers were compelled to see after his death, that he was trying to solve an insoluble problem. "Very early indeed" says an eminent pourtrayer of his character "Wesley had been driven, sorely against his will, to make a distinct separation of his societies in London and at Bristol, from the Church of England. The Clergy not only excluded the Wesleys from their pulpits, but often repelled both them and their converts from the Lord's Table. This was first done on a large scale, and with systematic harshness and persistency, at Bristol in 1740. The brothers believed they had no alternative but to administer the sacrament themselves in their own preaching.

rooms. The practice having thus been established at Bristol, the original society at the "Foundery" naturally claimed the like privilege, the more so as too many of the London Clergy acted towards Wesley's followers in the same manner as those at Bristol."⁽²⁾ Thus, in the most essential usages of church life, was Wesley driven against his will by the clergy of the Established Church, to make provision for his followers outside its pale. If some of the bishops and clergy had had their way, they would have curbed and harnessed the Wesleys as tightly as they themselves were curbed and harnessed, and the whole glorious work of spiritual revival might have been brought to a stand-still. Fortunately for Methodism they failed.

The interval of four years which had elapsed since Mr. Wesley's last visit to Madeley had been marked by many changes in Mr. Fletcher's parish. We saw him in July 21st, 1764, bearing himself calmly in the midst of persecution from many of the clergy and laity in the neighbourhood, and rejoicing in the sympathy of Wesley during his short but timely visit. Since then he had continued his good work with unswerving steadfastness, and unabated zeal, which at length yielded fruit in the form of an increase of religious life throughout the parish. Little societies were established here and there on the same lines as those formed by Mr. Wesley at Shrewsbury and elsewhere, in which the serious minded found comfort and encouragement in christian intercourse, prayer, and the study of the scriptures. A few lay preachers were supplementing his work in outlying parts of the parish and the neighbourhood; amongst them being Joseph Easterbrook, who had been

(2) Dr. Rigg's "The Living Wesley."

recommended to Mr. Fletcher by Lady Huntingdon to be his village schoolmaster. This young man had been educated at Kingswood, and was desirous to have the benefit of Mr. Fletcher's preaching, to secure which privilege he obtained the kindly influence of that distinguished lady. Captain Scott and Mr. Wesley's assistants had also met with a hearty reception. When Mr. Alexander Mather came to the Shrewsbury circuit, Mr. Fletcher wrote to him a letter of welcome, in which he said, "An occasional exhortation from you, or your companion (Mr. William Minthorpe), at the Bank, Dale, etc., will be esteemed a favour; and I hope that my going, as Providence directs, to any of your places (leaving to you the management of the societies) will be deemed no encroachment. In short, we need not make *two parties*; I know but *one* heaven below, and that is Jesus' love. Let us both go and abide in it, and when we have gathered as many as we can to go with us, too many will stay behind." (1)

All that is recorded by Mr. Wesley in his *Journal* regarding this visit is, "I preached for Mr. Fletcher in the morning, and in the evening at Shrewsbury." It would have been gratifying to us had he given some information as to the condition of the society in Shrewsbury. The fortunate preservation of a single letter

1) The late Rev. Luke Tyerman in his life of Fletcher (p. 100) dates the commencement of Methodism in Salop from the appointment of Alexander Mather and William Minethorpe to the circuit in 1765; which is an error. I have already shewn that John Appleton had fitted up the Sherman's Hall four years prior to this. My friend Mr. Thrusfield Smith, of Whitchurch, Salop, who has given much attention to the origin of Methodism in the county, has sent me an extract from the *Christian History*, which proves there was a cause here as early as 1744-5. This extract will appear in an appendix to these pages.

referring to events which happened on the occasion of Mr. Wesley's presence here sheds a little light on the situation of affairs :—

Hawkstone, October 24th, 1768.

" Rev. sir,—Since you did me the honour to give me an invitation to write to you, I now embrace the opportunity of sending you a few lines. If you remember, sir, I had the pleasure of seeing you at Mrs. Glynn's, at Shrewsbury, early in the morning ; having travelled part of the night before, expecting to have had the satisfaction of hearing you preach, but as your time was short, I was disappointed of that pleasure. Your christian advice, to persevere in the ways of Godliness, gave me great encouragement ; and I have found by blessed experience, what the Word of God says of true religion, that her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. Blessed be God, I have two brothers and two sisters who experience the truth of what I have been saying.

I have great reason to hope that much good has been done in and about this neighbourhood of late, by the preaching of the everlasting gospel. O may the Lord grant that all real christians who have felt the love and peace of God shed abroad in their hearts, by the Holy Ghost given unto them, may be blessed instruments in the Lord's hands of turning many from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

When I saw you at Shrewsbury, I asked you whether we could hope to see you in this neighbourhood, for many of our people would be glad to hear you at our Society-Room. If you think of coming to Shrewsbury next Spring, I hope you will favour us with your good company and take our society in your way. If you will come amongst us I do assure you, sir, you will meet with a most hearty reception. And if you can conveniently, let me know the time of your coming, and I will take care to provide for your reception. I hope, sir, you will not refuse us this favour. If you cannot come yourself, beg of your good brother, if he comes into these parts with you, to come in your stead. I wish we could have the pleasure of seeing you both. But if we cannot, at least let us

have the satisfaction of seeing one of you. Pardon, sir, the liberty I have taken, and when you favour me with a letter, please to let me know if we are to have the pleasure of seeing you. Meanwhile, I remain sincerely, dear sir, your humble servant,

T.H—ll. (1)

The writer of this letter, Mr. Thomas Hill, I take to be a son of Sir Rowland Hill, the first baronet, by Jane, daughter of Sir Brian Broughton; he was therefore a younger brother of Sir Richard Hill the second baronet, and Sir John, the third baronet, but older than his celebrated brother, the Rev. Rowland Hill, of Surrey Chapel, London. He afterwards lived at Prees as a private gentleman attracting little notice, but was evidently a man of strong religious feeling, and was engaged in promoting the work of God in his neighbourhood. For some unexplained reason his name does not occur in Burke's Peerage.

Mr. Wesley was entertained as on former occasions by Mrs. Glynne, whose house was the meeting place of a growing circle of friends interested in his great work, a circle composed of the upper rank of Shropshire society; she was at the same time a connecting link between them and the humbler folk who formed the Methodist society in Shrewsbury. The earnest invitation addressed to Mr. Wesley by the writer of the letter to visit "our society room," wherever that might have been, shows how highly he was appreciated.

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Wesley leaves Worcester for Shrewsbury—Visits Mr. Lee of Coton—His character—Wesley's Route—Bridgnorth and Baxter—The Severn Valley—Long Journeys—Punctuality—Approach to Shrewsbury—Appearance of the Old Town—Preaches at Shearman's Hall—His Personal Appearance—Proceeds to Chester.

IN March the following year (1769), Mr. Wesley came again into Shropshire, by way of Worcester, where he had preached at six o'clock in the morning at the Riding-house. "Abundance of people were deeply attentive, but towards the close a large number of boys made a great noise. When we came out, men and boys joined together in shouting and pushing to and fro. Many were frightened, but none hurt. Hitherto could Satan come, but no farther."

The following day, Wednesday 15th, he started for Shrewsbury, a ride of 50 miles. He writes: "My horse being lame, and part of the road very bad, I did not reach Mr. Lee's, of Coton, till noon. The house is delightfully situated in his park at the top of a fruitful hill. His chaplain had just begun reading prayers. Afterwards he desired me to give an exhortation, so I could not take horse till half-hour after one, when I had eight-and-twenty miles to ride on a lame horse. I came, however, to Shrewsbury, between five and six, and preached to a large and quiet congregation. As we returned, the rabble were noisy enough; but they used only their tongues. So all was well."

Coton Hall is in the parish of Alveley, about a mile east of the high road from Kidderminster to Bridgnorth,

It is described as a stuccoed mansion, pleasantly situated on a gentle eminence, commanding some fine views of the adjacent country. The park comprises about 80 acres, and is agreeably diversified with graceful undulations.

Mr. Lee was the representative of a younger branch of the Lees of Langley, near Shrewsbury, one of the oldest families in the county, "ascending by undoubted evidence to within a few years from the Norman Conquest." He was a man of considerable property, and numbered amongst his friends Mr. Fletcher, Mr. Powis, of Berwick, Capt. Scott, Sir Richard Hill, and many other Shropshire men who were known to be actuated by a deep regard for religion. He had a pleasing presence and excellent endowments. The Rev. Mr. Venn, a competent reader of character who had made his acquaintance, in a letter to Lady Huntingdon, says:—"He is, I think, of all the persons I ever saw in my life, the very one you would be made a blessing to. His understanding is clear and strong; his sight of human nature in its fall amazingly deep; his spirit bold and intrepid; only fearful of being deceived to take that for grace and faith which may not be so. He speaks of himself as yet a seeker; and I trust the Lord will give him to know His love, and His peace, and the power of His resurrection." Mr. Venn had met Mr. Lee at Berwick, while on a visit to Mr. Powis, and had accompanied Mr. Powis on a return visit to Coton, where he preached in the parlour to eighty people. He proceeds to say in his letter, "If your ladyship comes into Shropshire, he will certainly seek an opportunity of being in your company; or if he goes to Bath, you will see him

there in the spring." When writing to another correspondent, Miss Wheeler, about the same date, Mr. Venn says: "Mr. Lee is a gentleman of fortune, about forty years of age, and a man of uncommon parts, with whom I was much delighted."

Having paid his hurried visit to Mr. Lee, Mr. Wesley turned the head of his lame horse towards Shrewsbury, eight and twenty miles distant. Regaining the high road the route he took would probably be through the picturesque country lying near the left bank of the Severn, an undulating and well wooded district. Passing through the little village of Quatt with its ancient church ; and Quatford, memorable as the site of a Danish camp, he would reach the striking old town of Bridgnorth. There is no evidence that Methodism had yet found a footing in this ancient borough, nor that either of its clergymen, if they had known he was coming, would have offered him his pulpit. As the scene of the early labours of the good Richard Baxter, who dedicated his "Saints Rest" to its inhabitants, Wesley could hardly have passed the place without calling him to mind, especially as the conspicuous tower of St. Leonard's Church, where he preached, must necessarily have met his eye. It is said that when Baxter left the town he shook the dust from off his feet against the inhabitants, and declared that their hearts were harder than the rock on which their town was built. How little does the Christian labourer know the good he is accomplishing in spite of his discouragements! Baxter's work won ample fruit in Bridgnorth long after he pronounced this hasty verdict,

Leaving Bridgnorth, Wesley proceeded to Much Wenlock, passing over Wenlock Edge down to Cressage, where he would enter again the valley of the Severn, having before him the bold outline of the Wrekin, the lower heights of Haughmond Hill, the broken line of the distant Welsh mountains, with the well cultivated intervening plain through which the noble Severn winds its way spread out in all its loveliness. Few English landscapes excel this in beauty. Pursuing his journey and passing near Cound, and the Weeping Cross, he entered Shrewsbury by the Abbey Foregate. Although only a century and a quarter have passed away since this visit, yet the town must have presented a very different aspect to John Wesley from what it does to the modern traveller. Many black and white timber houses, since destroyed, lined each side of the road down what was then called Monk's Foriet. The high sandstone wall, which some aged people still remember, was then standing, enclosing the Abbey grounds, the road passing round it near the Horse Fair. The old stone bridge with its massive square tower, portcullis, and drawbridge, replaced about five years later by the present English Bridge, barred the entrance to the town. That crossed, he would enter the low lying street known as Under the Wyle, where Jones's mansion, Sherar's house, and other residences of the wealthy burgesses of Queen Elizabeth's reign, were then to be seen. The steep ascent of the Wyle Cop, the mediæval aspect still lingering in the small shop windows, the quaint gabled buildings, the ill paved streets, form a fitting scene in which we may conceive the venerable figure of John Wesley, now 66 years of age, on his lame and tired horse after a fifty miles ride, arriving in Shrewsbury between five and six o'clock on that March evening of 1769.

For the greater part of his itinerant life John Wesley calculated that he never travelled less than 4,500 miles in a year. One of his longest and most trying journeys is said to be the one he made from Shrewsbury to Lampeter, occupying twenty hours, five years prior to the present one. To ride from sixty to seventy miles in the day, besides preaching twice or thrice was an ordinary performance with him. (1) The twenty-eight miles from Coton to Shrewsbury occupied him three hours, which gives a rate of nine miles per hour; a good speed considering that the horse had not only to carry his master, but also his saddle-bags, in which were his change of raiment, articles of toilet, gown and cassock, without which he never preached, and a number of books and papers.

I have assumed he took the route through Bridgnorth and Much Wenlock, because the alternative route would have led him through the district in which Fletcher's religious societies were established. As it was he passed within five miles as the crow flies, of the parish church of his dear coadjutor; but his present programme required that he should elude the importunity of his friends and admirers in the populous district of Madeley and Ironbridge, and keep his appointment at Shrewsbury. His engagements to preach at certain places were made long beforehand, from which he allowed nothing to divert him. It was this remarkable punctuality which enabled him to get through so large an amount of work.

Arriving at the summit of the Wyle Cop, he would turn to the right into the street known as Dogpole,

(1) Rigg's *Living Wesley*, p. 156.

where he would find the house of Mrs. Glynne, his resting place for the night. But his day's work is not completed. A large and quiet congregation anxiously awaits him in the Shearman's Hall, whither, after changing his attire, and partaking of refreshment, he repairs. The congregation would include all the members of the society in Shrewsbury, conspicuous among them would be Mrs. Glynne and John Appleton ; a small contingent from the societies about Hawkstone, Madeley, Wem, and Whitchurch, and probably a few of the upper classes of the town and neighbourhood.

It will be difficult to form a life-like picture in our minds of the evening service except by recalling the feelings experienced by ourselves when assembled with others to hear an eminent preacher whose reputation for holiness and spiritual power has been the talk of his generation. It will aid us if we reproduce a sketch of Wesley's personal appearance, and manner of address, drawn by a masterly hand in a recently published work previously quoted :—“ Doubtless Wesley as a speaker, had many and great natural advantages. His person, although of small stature, was symmetrical, elegant, and manly. His carriage and address were frank and graceful. His features were handsome and expressive, combining dignity and sweetness, sensibility and firmness, and not without a certain air of mild and unconscious authority. The pure transparency of his fair complexion and the vivid power of his eye—his eye was of many moods, and must, I think, have been of a bright hazel colour—added to the charm and impressiveness of his personal aspect. * * * Unlike Whitefield, he had no pictorial power or dramatic inspiration, nor had he, like

the same great preacher, a special power of effusive pathos. Though tenderness, and controlled suggestive pathos, were eminently his, he had not the near and ready 'gift of tears' which belonged to Whitefield, and also to Charles Wesley, who seems, in some respects, when at his best, to have occupied, as a preacher, a position intermediate between his brother and Whitefield. He excelled in statement and exposition, in argument which had the closest coherency and force of logic, without any of its forms, without a trace of pedantry or of the manner of the schools, in analysis of reasons and motives, in home-thrusts of application, in plain and earnest appeal ; as a speaker he was, in brief, lucid, engaging, expressive, impressive. * * * But his use of rhetoric was sparing, of fancy or imagination there is scarcely a trace in all his writings : while what would to-day be described as sensational preaching, would have been abhorrent to his taste. The power by which he gripped and held and overwhelmed the souls of his hearers was partly logical, partly spiritual. Its inspiration was merely faith and love, the christian faith, the christian love." (2)

The following day (March 16th, 1769), Mr. Wesley took his journey to Chester in company with some one whose name he does not mention, simply observing, "We rode, with a furious wind full in our face, to Chester." Thomas Olivers was stationed there, and it is not improbable that he may have found time to meet Mr. Wesley on the way, as it would afford them a favourable opportunity for interchange of opinion on many subjects of interest and importance affecting the interests of the connexion.

(2) Rigg's "The Living Wesley," p. 128. The reader should refer to this work which I dare not quote here at greater length,

CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Wesley again at Shrewsbury—Invited to preach at Berwick—Mr. Powys's Family and Estate—Captain Scott and Mr. Venn at Berwick—Mr. Wesley on his way to Trevecca—His Route—Welshpool—Richard Rodda at Bishop's Castle.

HERE is no event to record relating to Shropshire between this and the next visit of Mr. Wesley in August of the same year (1769). He writes, "Monday 7. I returned (from Birstall Hill) to Manchester, and, on Tuesday 8, I went to Shrewsbury. I preached at five, and soon after receiving an invitation from Mr. Powys, at Berwick, I went over directly, gave a short exhortation, and returned to Salop."

The Berwick estate is immediately on the outskirts of Shrewsbury, a mile and half to the north-west. The house, at that time, was a large brick mansion, seated in a pretty, but not extensive park adorned with well-grown handsome trees. It was built by Mr. Powys's grandfather when he purchased the estate in 1728. He was a gentleman of large fortune and high connections, and had served the office of High Sheriff of Shropshire in 1762. He married Mary, a daughter of German Pole, Esq., of Radborne, co. Derby, and both he and his wife being very intimate with the family of the Hill's, of Hawkstone, became acquainted, through them, with Lady Huntingdon, whom they visited at Oathill, and frequently met afterwards at Brighton, during the summer of 1766. Her Ladyship introduced them to Mr. Whitefield and Mr. Fletcher, and other of her select friends. Neither Mr. Powys nor his lady took offence at the religious

proceedings or pious conversation of these earnest Methodists. On one occasion they were on a visit to Mr. Venn, in Yorkshire, when Mr. Whitefield wrote to Mr. Powys, congratulating him on having around him four Methodist preachers (Mr. Venn, Mr. Ryland, Dr. Conyers, and Mr. Powley, vicar of Dewsbury). "Enough," he observes, "when Jesus says, 'Loose them and let them go to set a whole kingdom on fire for God.'"

It was at Berwick that Captain Scott made the acquaintance of Mr. Venn, having received a letter of introduction to Mr. Powys from Mr. Romaine. The visit is worth recording, as exhibiting the spirit of these men. "Capt. Scott rode to Berwick to deliver the letter which Mr. Romaine had entrusted to him. We have said that at that time Mr. Powys entertained Mr. Venn as a visitor in his house. One morning, soon after breakfast and family prayer, Mr. and Mrs. Powys and Mr. Venn were looking from the parlour window in front of the hall, and who should they see but Capt. Scott enter upon the lawn, dressed in his uniform and riding his military horse. Mr. Powys recognised him at a distance, and said, "There is Captain Scott ; what can he want here ? I am determined not to see him if I can avoid it." Upon this they all withdrew.

Captain Scott rode up and asked, "Is Mr. Powys at home ?" The servant, uninstructed by his master to adopt the fashionable expedient of stating an untruth to avoid an inconvenience, informed him that he was. Mr. Powys was called, and received his visitor with an air of distant civility, thinking that his presence would be an interruption to the spiritual enjoyment of himself and

friends ; but after he had read Mr. Romaine's letter, which he received with considerable agitation, giving an account of Captain Scott's conversion, he caught him in his arms, embraced and rejoiced over him, as over one raised from the dead. In this position, with an elevated voice, he cried out "Mr. Venn ! Mr. Venn ! Mrs. Powys ! Mrs. Powys ! come, come here quickly. Here is Captain Scott, a convert to Christ, a new creature in Christ Jesus." They both came, and being informed of the contents of Mr. Romaine's letter, all three, in the joy of their hearts, embraced the penitent, and, in imitation of the angels in heaven, rejoiced over him who had been dead, but was alive again ; who had been lost, but was found." ¹⁾

The little chapel in which John Wesley preached on the occasion of his visit is situated in the park of Berwick House, embosomed in trees. It was erected in 1680, in the early English style, consisting of chancel, nave, and western tower with pinnacles ; it has one bell. While I write it is undergoing considerable alterations, and, no doubt, is losing the plain and simple character it had in Mr. Wesley's time. It is in the parish of St. Mary, the incumbent at the time of Mr. Wesley's visit was the Rev. John Tombs Wingfield, M.A., son of John Wingfield, M.D., of Onslow, near Shrewsbury. This is the only instance on record of Mr. Wesley preaching in a building belonging to the Established Church in Shropshire, excepting Madeley Church ; and I ought to add, perhaps, that it is not absolutely certain he did preach here, though I assume he did, for at this time it was becoming a frequent practice to hold semi-public

(1)—*Life and Times of Count Hunt.* 1, p. 145.

services in rooms of private houses, when there was no domestic chapel. The same doubt applies to the occasion of Lady Huntingdon's visit to Berwick in the following year, when Mr. Venn preached in the morning, and Mr. Berridge in the afternoon.

Shrewsbury owed the presence of Mr. Wesley, a second time in the same year, to the fact that he was on his way to attend the anniversary of Lady Huntingdon's college at Trevecca.

The route he pursued was via Welshpool, necessitating his crossing the Welsh Bridge, a fine old structure presenting many features of architectural interest, taken down in 1770. "It consisted of seven arches, which, having been repaired with stone of different colours, had been mellowed by age into a rich and venerable tint. The gates at each extremity were of the finest kind of castellated building." Over the gate on the Welsh side was a massive square tower with battlements, the chamber of which served in modern times as a guard room for soldiers. "The gate next the town stood on the bridge within one arch of its extremity, and was of uncommon beauty. Its arch on the north side was in the most graceful manner of the pointed style, and was furnished with a portcullis and doors studded with iron ; above was as usual, a chamber lighted by a narrow window, and over it a machicolated battlement, particularly deep and projecting much over the walls. In the centre of this in a canopied nich, was the statue of a knight in complete armour, having one hand lifted on his breast, the other pointing to a device on a corbel below, which was three roses carved on a stalk," believed to represent Richard Duke of York, the father of Edward

VI. (1.) The quick eye and cultivated taste of Mr. Wesley could not fail to be delighted with so beautiful a specimen of ancient work, now, alas ! vanished.

He writes in his journal :—“ Wed. 9. We reached Welshpool before nine, where notice had been given of my preaching, the Bailiff having granted the use of the Town Hall. But he had now changed his mind. So I rode on to Newtown, and at one we went to the market house. But in a few minutes a poor wretch, exceeding drunk, came in cursing and blaspheming, and striking all that stood in his way. His stick was soon taken from him ; but the noise increasing. I removed to the Brynn and quietly finished my discourse.” The success of Mr. Wesley and his preachers in Wales was very limited : in the Minutes of this year only three hundred members are put down for the whole Principality, which may be accounted for by the facts that the Calvinistic form of Methodism appeared better suited to the genius of the Welsh, and Mr. Wesley had no desire to trespass on ground already occupied.

In 1770 Richard Rodda, one of Mr. Wesley’s preachers, admitted at the Conference of the previous year, a Cornish miner whose heart the Lord had touched, who was engaged in preaching partly in Pembrokeshire, and partly in Brecknockshire and Radnorshire, prompted by the true missionary spirit, paid a visit to Shropshire, of which he gives the following account :—

” In this round I attempted to enlarge our borders. In the strength of the Lord I went to Bishop’s Castle, a town wicked to a proverb. I had nobody with me, but the Lord was with me of a truth. I put my horse

(1) This may now be seen on the front of the old Market Hall, where it was placed when the bridge was destroyed.

up at an inn, and wrote a lesson for the crier. I gave him this and the money at the same time: after reading the notice he began to make some scruples. I told him he had taken my money, and therefore I insisted that he would do his duty. Accordingly he published me to preach under the Town Hall, the most public and convenient place in the town. At the time appointed, hundreds flocked to hear. I stood on the steps and preached from Amos, v, 6. I bless God, he did not let me want matter, manner, or liberty! Some threw their hats in my face; but that did not hinder me from proceeding. The tears trickled down many faces; and after I had done five or six came round me and begged I would come again. I believe the power of the Highest reached many hearts; and had my successors followed the blow, the kingdom of Satan might have been shaken in that wicked town.”⁽²⁾

Bishop’s Castle is a small borough about twenty miles south-west of Shrewsbury, close on the Welsh border, having a population of about two thousand souls: in addition to the Established Church, it has a Congregational, Primitive Methodist, and Wesleyan Chapel.

(2) *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*, 8th ed. II, p. 311.

CHAPTER VIII

The Calvinian Controversy—Its Effects in Shropshire—Fruit of Methodist Labours in Shrewsbury—Mrs. Elizabeth Hill.

EAPPILY, it is not the duty of the writer of these lines to deal with the history of Methodism except so far as concerns Shrewsbury, and the county of which that town is the capital, and therefore the unpleasant task of entering into the details of the unhappy Calvinian controversy may be touched on very lightly. It is impossible, however, to pass over the year 1770, in which it broke out, without alluding to its far reaching influence and disastrous results.

At the annual conference of Methodist preachers which assembled in London on August 7th, and terminated ten days afterwards, certain minutes were made relating to the doctrines to be held and enforced by the whole body of preachers, in opposition more especially to those propounded by Calvin, which had been extensively embraced by the followers of Whitefield. A considerable amount of dissension had occurred previous to this in several of the Methodist societies throughout England between those who held with Arminius, and those who held with Calvin; but the emphatic condemnation of Antinomianism contained in the minutes brought to a climax the storm which had been gradually gathering, and one of the most painful and mischievous controversies ensued that ever rent a body of Christian men asunder. The leaders on each side saw with sorrow the disasters that loomed in the immediate future. Lady

Huntingdon, when she received a copy of the minutes, with tears in her eyes tore it up and cast it into the fire. She refused Mr. Wesley's presence and co-operation at the anniversary of her college, established at Trevecca two years previously, dismissed Mr. Benson, the able classical tutor, a bosom friend of Mr. Wesley and Mr. Fletcher, from that institution, and virtually compelled Fletcher to surrender into her hands the governorship he had held since its foundation. Then followed the great war of words between those who had been hitherto united in christian love and good works. All Methodists ranged themselves with one or other of the contending parties ; the Press was set in motion, and the country was flooded with pamphlets laden with strong, if not angry criticisms, maiming like barbed arrows those against whom they were directed.

We cannot suppose that Shrewsbury remained unaffected. As when a mass of rock detached by the elements from a precipice is plunged into a calm lake it sends its ripples to the most distant bays, so the towns and villages throughout the country felt the effects of this controversial shock. Of the Shropshire men who took part in it ; Mr. Fletcher, Mr. Richard Hill, and his brother, the celebrated Rowland Hill, of Surrey Chapel, were most prominent ; and these in their several circles of influence affected others. Co-operation in good work, exchange of visits, the pursuits of the higher aims of the christian life, were interrupted, and a general decline in charity followed. We have no record of the extent to which the little society in Shrewsbury was disturbed, but that it still clung together is pretty obvious, for when Mr. Wesley visited it in the following year he saw no cause to express regret.

To Wesley this controversy was uncongenial; he was a lover of peace. In a letter to his intimate friend, Lady Maxwell, he wrote "I commend you for meddling with points of controversy as little as possible. It is abundantly easier to lose our love in that rough field, than to find the truth. This consideration has made me exceedingly thankful to God for giving me a respite from polemical labours." It was equally distasteful to Fletcher on whose shoulders had fallen the burden of defending his friend Wesley. "I long to be out of controversy," he wrote to Joseph Benson in 1772, "and yet," says his biographer Tyerman, "he continued it. He could not help himself. To say nothing of the duty he owed to Christ, and gospel truth, it was impossible at present, to retire from the field of conflict without exposing himself to the taunt of recreant timidity." Richard Hill, writing to Fletcher from whom he differed so widely on the questions in dispute, said, "God alone knows the sorrow of heart wherewith I address you, and how much the fear of casting stumbling blocks before some who are really sincere, and the apprehension of giving malicious joy to others who desire no greater satisfaction than to see the children of the Prince of Peace divided among themselves, had well-nigh prevailed upon me to pour out my soul in silence instead of taking up my pen against you." Again he writes, after the conflict had been proceeding some time:—"And now, dear sir, I cannot conclude these letters without expressing my earnest desire that the contents of them may never cause any decrease of love and christian fellowship between us. . . . In the meanwhile, let me acknowledge before the world that there is not a man living to whom I am more indebted for repeated instances of affection and labours of love,

than I am to dear Mr. Fletcher ; and therefore, notwithstanding all differences of judgment between us, I trust he will always give me leave to subscribe myself his most affectionate friend and brother, in the bonds of the gospel of peace. ‘The author of *Pietas Oxoniensis.*’⁽¹⁾

His younger brother Rowland, though he threw himself with much warmth into the *mèlée*, said, doubtless with perfect sincerity, “Peace I love, but controversy I hate.”

In the case of each of these good men the better side of their character is displayed in the words they wrote and spoke, and I for one, would gladly draw the veil of oblivion over the less-to-be admired language they allowed themselves, in the heat of controversy, to indulge in. The battle is over, the weapons are laid aside, the warriors have gone to their rest, and we of this generation should learn the lesson, that little is gained by religious controversy, and much lost by impeding, as it must do, the extension of practical godliness.

In the month of March the following year (1771) Mr. Wesley writes in his journal. “I had the pleasure of spending an hour at Kidderminster with that good man, Mr. Fawcett. I reached Shrewsbury but a few minutes before the time of preaching. The mob were quieter than usual, as they were likewise the next night.”

All we can infer from this brief entry is, that the presence of the great preacher aroused the old town from its usual lethargy, and attracted a large number of people to gain a sight of him. There must have been something in the conduct of the crowd which induced him to designate them a “mob.”—not a very complimentary

(1) Tyerman’s Life of Fletcher, p. 226.

term to apply to the good burgesses of Shrewsbury; but he somewhat modified the reproachful epithet by adding, they "were quieter than usual, as they were likewise the next night."

History is not altogether silent respecting the good work which Wesley's successive visits to Shrewsbury produced, as the following biographical notice of one of the members of the society will show. Here is the brief record of a saintly character striving, amidst numerous domestic duties and troubles, to rise to the highest elevation of personal holiness—the realisation of the pure ideal of Christian life set up by the teaching of that great and good evangelist, concluded by an account of her peaceful and happy departure to her Master's presence

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE LATE MRS. HILL,
OF SHREWSBURY.

"Mrs. Elizabeth Hill from her earliest years had a sense of the fear of God, and even then experienced the drawings of His spirit. She was blessed with a conscience so tender, that sin was very heinous in her eye. Having unhappily acquired a habit of taking the holy name of God in vain, she was so powerfully convinced of the sinfulness of that custom, that she earnestly requested her little playfellows to pinch, or beat her severely, whenever she was guilty of it. By thus taking heed to her ways she was enabled to break herself of this sin, and walk in a strictly upright and moral manner, though destitute of the power of godliness until she became acquainted with the Methodists in Shrewsbury, which was soon after the commencement of their preaching in that town; and shortly she was brought to experience the gospel of Christ to be the power of God unto salvation. She was one of the

little flock first gathered into society there, upwards of 30 years ago, and who for several years enjoyed the benefit of having the excellent Miss Hatton for their leader. The persecutions they suffered were sometimes very great, yet the Lord stood by them, and enabled them to endure. Mrs. Hill in the latter part of her life, frequently expressed the highest sense of gratitude to God, for having kept her above those, and other severe trials she had to pass through at that juncture, and that since then, 'the lines had fallen to her in pleasant places'; in the ardour of her soul she often exclaimed, 'O, how good is God!'

"From the beginning she ornamented her profession by an indefatigable diligence in the means of grace, and was remarked for regularly attending the morning preaching at five o'clock, as well as all other opportunities nor did she ever forget that social duty too much neglected by many, of family prayer, enjoining it upon her household, to fear the Lord. She was equally assiduous that her family should at every season, accompany her to places of public worship. Her piety towards God was highly animated and exemplary; and in her lovely character, friendship, and maternal affection shone no less conspicuous. She had a peculiar sweetness of temper, and affability of demeanour, which rendered her extensively esteemed. She had a fine melodious voice, surpassed by few, which she greatly delighted to exercise in singing the Redeemer's praise; and ardently anticipated the blissful moment when she should join the choral concert of heaven in more exalted strains. The general state of her mind, as she expressed it in her class, was serene and comfortable. She sustained her various

afflictions with perfect resignation ; and there was every reason to believe her communion with God, was steady and deep. Of late years her walking to chapel was attended with much difficulty and fatigue, on account of the state of her bodily frame ; but still she omitted little of her former diligence in expressing her love to God, His servants, His word and ordinances by her attendance in His house. Whenever her place was vacant, it was matter of surprise ; as unless something extraordinary had happened, it was scarcely known to be the case.

“ She enjoyed a tolerable state of health, excepting being sometimes confined by the rheumatism, until last New Year’s Day, when she had a paralytic fit, which was succeeded by another, and brought her very low. However, she so far recovered as to be removed to her daughter’s house in the country, some miles distant, and was there so materially better as to be able to walk in the garden alone. She afterwards wrote some letters to her absent children, but was presently attacked by another fit. She was then put to bed, and a medical gentleman sent for. But she continued in great pain until the Friday following, and was then only transiently better. On Monday morning she said she had had a very bad night. A friend desiring to sympathise with, and comfort her, observed that her sorrow was very great. —*Sorrow ! I know it not* (she exclaimed). True, my pain is *very great*, but my soul rejoices in my God ! I deserve to feel a thousand times more for not serving Him better. Oh ! how I love my Jesus. He has saved me from sorrow. I have not known sorrow for many years.

“ When the apothecary felt her pulse, she said, ‘ what news have you ? ’ He replied that her pulse was

more regular and that he hoped she was better. 'That is bad news,' she rejoined, 'had you said, Mrs. Hill, you will be no more in a few hours,' that would have been good news indeed.' Addressing herself to Mrs. Palin (her daughter), she said, 'O, how great should our love be to Christ and His cause. What a feeble spirit I have had—how timorous' and expressed a sense of unutterable self-abasement on account of not having spoke or done more to the honour of God.

"The Tuesday before her departure, observing Mrs. Palin much distressed, she said with a smile, 'You need not grieve, you will not be long after me. I shall have the pleasure of bidding you welcome to the kingdom of my Lord. O, my dear Fanny, if you knew my sufferings, you would earnestly pray for my release; but I know you do not.' At another time, expressing her regret at not having been more engaged in the Lord's service, she said, 'Was I to be raised up again, perhaps it would be the same; but suffer it not, my Lord! Oh! Fanny, there is no trimming between the world and Christ! Be more than ever provident of your time. Devote every moment you can from the cares of life, to the service of God, who has done so much for you and me. When I lost my dear partner 18 years ago, I took God for my husband, and a father to my dear children and He has been the best of husbands, and the most indulgent of fathers. I now commit you to Him, and am persuaded that He will remember you for good. If the stones and timber in my room could speak, they would bear witness to the many hours in which I have prayed for the salvation of each of my children. I love you all more than I can express, but I love my Jesus better.'

"To the servants and all around her she enforced the peace and blessedness of religion ; the value of time, and of an interest in Christ ; the insufficiency of worldly good, and the inexpressible glories of the invisible world. 'Soon,' said she, 'I shall see dear Miss Hatton, Mr. Fletcher, my babes, and all the saints that are on high.' She then in a manner that cannot be described, said, 'My God ! my God ! grant me *this one request*, that when life is over with me and mine, I may say before Thy throne, here am I, Lord, and the nine dear children Thou hast given me.' Nor did she forget those added to the family by sacred ties, each of whom alternately partook of her fervent prayers. She particularly desired a note might be sent to the chapel in Shrewsbury, containing these words, 'Elizabeth Hill, having been long in exquisite pain, prays that she may be immediately released, if agreeable to God's blessed will.' This note was sent on Wednesday night, and the petition duly attended to, and on Thursday morning she departed, in the 60th year of her age. During Wednesday she continued patient and cheerful, yet earnestly longing to be dissolved and to be with Christ. In the evening she took a little wine, after which she said, 'Now, no more in this world.' She then sung the following lines with great animation, and with a voice equally melodious as in any period of her life :—

" Come all ye drooping saints
And banquet with your King.

This wine shall drown your sad complaints,

And tune your voice to sing ;

Salvation to the name

Of our adored Christ ;

Through the wide world His grace proclaim,

His glory in the highest.

"On Thursday morning Mrs. Palin going into the room about seven o'clock, said, 'How do you do my dear mother?' she replied, 'Very well child, I have had a most comfortable night.' Presently afterwards she said, 'Oh, I am extremely ill,' and raising herself up, her eyes full fixed on heaven, and an angelic grandeur and sweetness in her countenance, continued several minutes saying, 'Pray for me! pray for me, pray!'—Here her voice failed, she closed her eyes, leaned back, and without a sigh or groan, sank into eternal rest.'

"Thus became immortal this exalted christian, leaving a bright and glorious example. Her countenance retained ineffable marks of the divine glory with which her happy spirit seemed filled, previous to her dissolution, while all present felt a celestial manifestation of the presence of the deity. On the Sunday following she was interred, and a funeral sermon preached to a numerous congregation from these words "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, &c." On her tombstone are written the following lines:—

"The sweet remembrance of the just,
Shall flourish when they sleep in dust."

Her virtues are recorded in the bosoms of her afflicted children and numerous friends.

THOMAS HILL." (1)

Liverpool, October 12th, 1798.

(1) Arminian Magazine of 1799.

CHAPTER IX.

Wesley's departure from Shrewsbury—His route—Arrival in Wem—Reminiscences of the Civil War—Methodists' influences there—Miss Hatton—Revd. Thomas Hatton—Mr. Henshaw.

WHE *Journal* proceeds:—"Friday, 15 March. Being desired to give them a sermon at Wem, and finding no house would hold the congregation, I stood in Mr. Henshaw's yard, when I opened and strongly applied those words, 'The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.' We were more at a loss what to do with the congregation at Whitchurch in the evening. At length we desired all that could, to squeeze into the house; the rest stood quietly without; and none, I believe repented their labour; for God was eminently present."

In a previous chapter I have tried to revive a picture of Shrewsbury, as it was when Mr. Wesley passed through it on a former occasion, he is now leaving by another route, the road to Wem. Owing to the river Severn entirely surrounding the town except where the narrow isthmus exists on the north side on which the castle, originally built by the Norman Earl Roger, stands, the old town had but three exits. The road to Wem lay through the North Gate, or Castle Gate. Assuming that he stayed at the house of Mrs. Glynne, he would take his way up Dogpole, having on his left hand the fine old church of St. Alkmund, with its graceful spire, in which his young disciple, the Rev. Richard de Courcy, was destined to officiate as vicar two years later. The sudden and disastrous fall of St. Chad's Church had not

yet happened, and the consequent scare which led to the pulling down of St. Julian's and St. Alkmund's churches had not arisen, so that the "handsome, curious, and substantial" old fabric of the latter was still standing. On his right was the still more beautiful church of St. Mary, which afterwards ran the risk of sharing the same fate, but happily this glorious monument of the piety and good taste of our ancestors is spared to us. A row of ugly red brick cottages, with disproportionately high chimneys—the Drapers' Almshouses—then stood immediately west of the church not far from where the iron railings now divide the churchyard from the street. Some years later these houses were destroyed and new ones built on the opposite side of the way. Turning to the right he would pass along the high pavement, now known as Castle Street, which then terminated on the brow of a very steep descent commencing near the entrance to the Castle, and ending near where the road diverges for Chester. This dangerous steep was altered by the exertions of the late Dr. Butler, head-master of Shrewsbury School, about 1825. Passing the free schools on the left and the castle on the right, Mr. Wesley would proceed to Wem by the Chester road. Being an observant and thoughtful man, his eye would doubtless be caught by the tower of Battlefield Church, three miles from Shrewsbury, standing on the site where the slaughtered soldiers were buried in that bloody engagement of July 22nd, 1403; "a battle that fixed the house of Lancaster} on the throne of England for three reigns, and may be called the earliest of those conflicts between the white and red roses, which fifty years afterwards filled the nation with calamity, and stained it with deluges of its best blood."

Wem is ten miles north of Shrewsbury, a market

town with one church, and several Nonconformist places of worship. It played a conspicuous part in the civil war in the time of Charles I., being at an early period garrisoned for the Parliament through the instrumentality of the well-known Richard Baxter, the famous dissenting minister. It sustained an attack of the Royal troops under the command of Lord Capel, when the town was but ill provided with defensive works; notwithstanding this, and the smallness of the defending force, Lord Capel with his army of 5,000 men was defeated with great loss, some of his best officers being killed or wounded. It is said that only forty soldiers held the town, but the courage of the inhabitants, especially of the women, was so conspicuous that it is still preserved in a rhyme:—

“The women of Wem and a few musketeers
Beat the Lord Capel and all his Cavaliers.”

Old Vicars, the Puritan writer, in his “God’s Ark overtopping the World’s Waters,” speaks of “the great slaughter and execution which were performed upon the enemy when they set upon Wem, there being six cart loads of dead men carried away at one time, besides the wounded, and as it is said, there were fifteen found buried in one grave. Little execution was done upon our men; we lost not above three in the town.” It was from this town at a later period in this unhappy war, that a force issued and captured Shrewsbury for the Parliament.

It was here that Thomas Olivers, after his conversion, performed that remarkable act of restitution recorded in his diary, by walking from Shrewsbury to pay a debt of sixpence.

Mr. Wesley’s former visit to Wem, nine years previously, was marked by an act of great courtesy on

the part of some one whose name he does not mention who had invited him to go there, but who for some unexplained reason, left the town at four o'clock in the morning of the day Wesley arrived. Since then the state of affairs at Wem had entirely altered. The current of evangelical life had found its way there through several channels, and now all was changed. Fletcher had long enjoyed the acquaintance of the Hatton family residing at Wem, with one of whom, Miss Hatton, he had carried on a correspondence in the highest degree religious up to the time of her death in 1767, the influence of which was greatly blessed to her. When writing to his friend Ireland, he said :—" Poor Miss Hatton died full of serenity, faith and love. The four last hours of her life were better than all her sickness. When the pangs of death came upon her, the comforts of the Almighty bore her triumphantly through."

The Rev. Thomas Hatton, another member of the same family, had derived much spiritual benefit from his acquaintance with the heavenly-minded vicar of Madeley, and had entered the Established Church imbued with similar views of religion. His first curacy was in the Isle of Man, when Fletcher wrote to him as follows :—

" Madeley, August 4th, 1762.

" *Revd. Sir,—There are so few of our profession in this county who are not ashamed of the cross of Christ, and of the homilies and articles of our church, that it gave me no small pleasure to hear you are not led away with the generality into dry empty notions of morality and formality; the two legs on which fashionable religion stalks through this so-called christian land. May the Lord Jesus convince us daily more and more, by His Spirit, of sin in ourselves, and of righteousness in Him! May we, in the strength of our dying Samson, pull down the buildings of self-righteousness, though the consequence should be to see all our hopes of preferment and esteem*

buried in the ruins ! May we never be led to preach another gospel than that of Christ ! ‘ He that believeth shall be saved ; he that believeth not shall be damned.’—(Mark xvi., 16).

“ I hope sir, you will not be discouraged. Regard not the wind, but sow your seed early and late, and the Lord of the harvest will give the increase, as seemeth best to His heavenly wisdom. I meet with many trials in my parish, but our faithful Lord opens always a door for me to escape ; and so he will for you.

“ I should be thankful to Providence, if your way should be made plam into this neighbourhood. You owe yourself to Shropshire in particular ; and no county needs hands for the spiritual harvest more than this does. I pray that the Lord of the Harvest may thrust you among us.

“ I bespeak a sermon when you come to Salop, trusting that you will not be ashamed to bear witness to the truth as it is in Jesus, from so despised a pulpit as that of, dear sir, your affectionate and weak fellow-servant in the gospel,”

“ J. FLETCHER.”

The earnest desire of Mr. Fletcher that his friend Mr. Hatton should come and reside in Shropshire was gratified a few years later ; he was inducted to the rectory of Waters Upton in 1764, thus adding one more to the small band of evangelical clergymen of the Church of England in the county.

Before dismissing this excellent man we may appropriately add here a few particulars of his life. He was of an old Shrewsbury family seated for many generations in the Abbey Foregate, a suburb of the town, the pedigree of which was entered in the herald’s visitation of Shropshire in 1623. After the suppression of the monasteries his ancestor, Thomas Hatton, was one of three to whom the original grantees of the manor of the Foregate, which had belonged to the Abbot of Shrewsbury, conveyed it in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and surviving the other two Thomas Hatton became the sole

possessor. He bequeathed it to his heirs, and it remained in the family till 1654, when Christopher Hatton parted with it for a consideration to Sir Richard Prince, knight. According to the burgess roll of Shrewsbury the Rev. Thomas Hatton, although living at Waters Upton, acquired his freedom as a burgess in 1796, and is recorded as the son of the Rev. Alexander Hatton who was himself admitted and sworn a burgess in 1721. The reason Mr. Thomas Hatton acquired this qualification we have not to go far to find. The year 1796 will be ever memorable in the annals of the town of Shrewsbury for an election contest unsurpassed for bitterness between Mr. John Hill of Hawkstone, and the Honourable Noel Hill, of Attingham, both descended from a common stock a few generations back ; a contest which is said to have cost each candidate £100,000, resulting in the return of the latter. Mr. Hatton was a friend of Mr. Richard Hill, and qualified in order to vote for his friend's near relative, the loosing candidate.

The year after his induction to the Rectory of Waters Upton, he married Leonora Boys, of Shrewsbury, the ceremony taking place at St. Alkmund's church in that town, December 12th, 1765. There was some reason to believe that this was not altogether a happy union, the lady being said to be somewhat eccentric in her manner, and that she required to be occasionally kept under restraint in their own house. He was of a kind and cheerful disposition, and on the most familiar terms with the humblest of his parishioners, and many stories of his playful humour even yet linger in the village. His dress was of the old style of George III., with the accompanying pig-tail. The latter he was wont sometimes to place

on his head with the tail in front to frighten naughty little children when words alone had failed. When at Waters Upton some two years ago, I visited in company with the Rector, old Jenny Austin, nowed down by age, and very deaf, whose mother was a domestic servant to Mr. Hatton, and was married from the Rectory. Jenny had been told by her mother that on one occasion as he was going through the village to marry a couple, he saw a woman untying with difficulty a cord from a wicket, when he playfully remarked : "I am going to tie a knot with my tongue which you cannot undo."

Like many other clergymen, then and now, he eked out his income by taking a few pupils to lay the foundation of their education. One of these was the eldest son of Nathaniel Gilbert, Esq., Speaker of the House of Assembly in Antigua, who had the credit of forming the first Methodist Society in the West Indies. Young Gilbert was sent to England when seven years of age, and three years later (about 1764) was placed under the care of the Rev. Thomas Hatton, from whom he acquired a knowledge of the Latin and Greek languages. On returning to Antigua, he found that the estate of his father was overwhelmed with debt, and that the subsistence of the family depended on a small jointure belonging to his mother. He came back to England, settled in the parish of Madeley, enjoyed the advantages of Fletcher's ministry and counsels, and devoted himself to God. He finally received episcopal ordination, the places of his ministerial labours being Bristol, London, Bridgnorth, Sierra Leone, Aveley and Bledlow. He was an eminently good and useful man, and peacefully fell asleep in Jesus in 1807, in the forty-sixth year of his age.

When the remains of John Fletcher were carried to the grave (1785), Thomas Hatton was requested by his bereaved widow to perform the funeral service, which he did with great feeling, and addressed the weeping flock in a pathetic manner. He also preached a funeral sermon founded on "*Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God ; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.— Heb. xiii, 7.*

Mr. Hatton held the living of Waters Upton 43 years, and died May 18th, 1807, at the age of 72. A small brass plate in the church records his memory, and a hatchment bearing his arms and crest still remains there. His widow, who was 14 years his senior, removed to Shrewsbury after his death, where she died January 27th, 1815, aged 93, having survived him nearly eight years, and was buried at Waters Upton.

Another name associated with Wem and Methodism is that of Mr. Samuel Henshaw, in whose yard Mr. Wesley preached to the large congregation already spoken of; a gentleman who took part in helping forward the religious awakening in the neighbourhood with Mr. Richard Hill, Capt. Jonathan Scott, and others. He attended divine service on the Lord's day at Shawbury Church, about six miles distant from Wem, while Mr. Stillingfleet, Mr. De Courcey, and Mr. Hallward, supplied the pulpit, and opened his house in the evening, where, if a preacher could be provided, a sermon was preached ; if no preacher were present, he read a sermon himself with great pathos, having previously studied the subject.

" After some time Mr. Henshaw applied to Lady Huntingdon to send some of her students to Wem ; and finding their house too small for the increasing number

of people assembled, Mr. Henshaw erected a suitable place of worship contiguous to his house. This chapel was soon after made over, by a written document, to Lady Huntingdon, and was supplied by the students from Trevecca for some years. In the beginning of the year 1777 her ladyship directed Mr. Hawksworth to stop at Wem; ‘where’ (says she), ‘I have a chapel, and there you may preach, and also in your way to college, at Worcester.’ At the close of the same letter her ladyship adds: ‘At Wem you are to enquire for Mr. Henshaw, attorney-at-law, at whose house the chapel is. They built it at their own expense, and most precious souls they are.’ In 1781, Mr. Richardson, a student from Trevecca, was supplying at Wem, but whether he remained there any time we are not certain. Mr. Richardson having expressed a wish to withdraw from the connexion, it was intimated to her ladyship by Mr. Henshaw, and in her reply she says: ‘Your thinking Richardson’s views might be more profitable for him, I cheerfully resign any restraints on my account, and by this fully release all my influence over him, praying it may prove best, and ever wishing to serve and do him any possible good in any way.’ At the same time her ladyship surrendered the chapel at Wem into the hands of Mr. and Mrs. Henshaw, for whom she ever entertained a very high esteem and friendship. ‘From a hint’ (says Lady Huntington), I received that it was both your and Mrs. Henshaw’s secret wish that the chapel you would desire to be in your own hands, as I am sure it could not be in any so well or so proper, I send the engagement to you, and truly wish I could have ever had it in my power, on this or on any other occasion, to prove the means of obliging either you or Mrs. Henshaw, and as being happy that this

has been the case hitherto, so it will not cease to be my wish, though not enough in my power to prove its extent, which I should ever hope might be unlimited for every best end. May our Lord abundantly bless you both, and encourage your hearts to persevere through every trial of faith and patience, till you arrive with the everlasting joy of the redeemed."

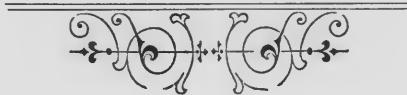
Mrs. Henshaw was the daughter of Stephen Tippet, Esq., of Truro, and awakened under the ministry of that eminent man of God, the late Rev. Samuel Walker. Mr. Henshaw was first introduced to her during a visit she made to her pious friends, Mrs. Edward Stillingfleet, of West Bromwich, and Mrs. Clay, of Hodnet, Salop, afterwards the excellent wife of the well-known Captain Scott: ladies possessed of handsome estates—and what was of far greater importance, ladies of eminent piety and exemplary prudence. One of Mr. Henshaw's sisters was afterwards united to the Rev. David Simpson, a respectable clergyman at Macclesfield. During Mrs. Henshaw's last stage of life, when a complication of disorders appeared to prevail against her, and strength and spirits became exhausted, the Lord graciously enabled her to bear the whole of her affliction with great calmness and serenity of mind, and with patient resignation to His will. Some of her last words were: 'Saviour! be my refuge and strength.' Mr. Henshaw, whose devoted attention to her for 35 years was unabated, survived her but a short time, and on February, 1st, 1801, he entered that

—“land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign.”

His dying scene was tranquil, he frequently employed his

thoughts in devotional hymns and select scriptures, and expressed more than a resignation of mind to his dissolution, crying out repeatedly, ‘Come. Lord Jesus, Come! ’ ” (¹)

(1) Life of Lady Huntingdon, Vol. ii, p. 39.



CHAPTER X.

Mr. Wesley at Whitchurch—Historical Associations—The Achilles of England—The Civil War of Chas. I.—Nonconformity—Philip Henry—Results of his labour—Dawn of Methodism—Lay Workmen—Mr. Heighway's early recollections—Mr. Wesley on a miserable road—Mr. Fletcher's letter to Joseph Benson—Captain Webb—His work in America—Sketch of him by Wesley—Converts Mather—He marries Miss Gilbert—His death.

QE left Mr. Wesley at Wem, where, in the morning of March 15th, 1771, he had arrived in answer to a desire expressed by the people there to give them a sermon, which he did from the words: “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch,” to an over-flowing congregation in Mr. Henshaw's yard.

From Wem he proceeded to Whitchurch, where it was arranged he should preach the same evening. All that John Leland, the antiquary, who was here in the reign of Henry VIII., had to record, was: “The Towne of Whitchurch in Shropshire hath a veri good Market And there in the Paroche Chirche is buried Syr Gilbert Talbot.” He does not allude to the valiant Sir John Talbot the “Achilles of England,” who by his extraordinary courage and military achievements struck terror into the hearts of the French in the reign of Henry VI., and whose remains were brought to England and laid in this church in 1453. The well-read mind of Mr. Wesley probably led him to visit the church, then recently re-built, to inspect the spot where the old hero lay, from which he would deduce the oft-repeated lesson of the

vanity of human greatness.⁽¹⁾ Had his visit taken place in our own time, that lesson would have been conveyed in a still more impressive manner. Some twenty years ago the skull of the great warrior was exposed to view, showing the fracture that caused his death, and proving beyond doubt that in the course of time it had become a mouse's nest, for from its interior three mummied mice were extracted. Thus, "the cranium in which great Talbot's brain had throbbed for four score years had become the procreant habitation of a colony of church mice, and the fatal gash which brought his life to a close, the orifice for ingress and egress, until supplies failed, and the little rodentia succumbed to the fate of the great warrior, and shared with him a common tomb."⁽²⁾

Hamlet.—To what base uses we may return, Horatio ! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bung-hole ?

Horatio.—T'were to consider too curiously to consider so.

Hamlet.—No, faith, not a jot Imperious Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away ;
O, that the earth, which kept the world in awe,
Should patch a wall to expel the winter's flaw ! ⁽³⁾

(1) When at Canterbury he walked over the Cathedral, and surveyed the monuments of the ancient men of renown. "One would think such a sight should strike an utter damp upon human vanity. What are the great, the fair, the valient now ? The matchless warrior,—the puissant monarch ?"

"An heap of dust is all remains of thee !
'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be,"—Journal 1750.

(2) The respected Rector of Whitchurch, the Rev. W. H. Egerton, contributed two interesting articles on the discovery of Talbot's remains, to the *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*, vol. viii., p. 413, and vol. x, p. 416.

(3) Shakspeare.

Whitchurch owed it to its situation on what was formerly the great high road between London and Dublin, that a great number of important personages have at different times honoured it with their presence.

At a very early period of the Civil War, when Charles I, was seeking recruits for his newly-formed army, he and the young prince dined here, September 23rd, 1642, on their way from Shrewsbury to Chester. The following year Lord Capel, the Royalist General occupied Whitchurch with his troops, making it for a time the centre of his military operations in Shropshire, Cheshire, and North Wales. It was here that some of the Roundheads beguiled the noble Lord into making an expedition to Cheshire that in his absence they might plunder the town and carry off the wagon containing his treasure of two thousand pounds. Prince Rupert and Prince Maurice frequently during their campaigns in these parts were at Whitchurch.

It will be more consonant, however, with our present task to refer to a fact bearing on the religious history of Whitchurch prior to the appearance of Mr. Wesley on the scene, rather than to the sad events of the Civil War. A little more than a hundred years before the date we have arrived at, there had been ejected for Nonconformity from his living at Worthenbury, eight miles west of Whitchurch, in Flintshire, a man who, for his holiness of life, lofty Christian principles, and steadfastness to the cause of Christ, can hardly be said to be surpassed by any man of his generation. I refer to the Rev. Philip Henry, father of Mathew Henry. Appointed to his living during the Commonwealth, ordained at Prees with the laying on of hands of the

Presbytery, 19th September, 1657, required to accept the Solemn League and Covenant, which he did in all truthfulness, he had not occupied his living ten years when, the restoration of Charles II. having taken place, and Episcopacy was restored, he was compelled to conform or to give up his living. To abjure what he had so recently sworn to observe, and to submit to re-ordination by the bishop, was too violent a *volte-face* for a man with so tender a conscience as Philip Henry, and he was ejected from his living. He went to reside on his own property at Broad Oak, a little less than three miles from Whitchurch, and in consequence of the Five Mile Act, he was led to take up his residence in this town for a time, but afterwards went again to Broad Oak, where he ended his days in 1696, and was buried in Whitchurch Parish Church. Strange to say that when the church was re-built in 1712, the remains of this pious Nonconformist were turned out into the churchyard, nobody knows where, while the bones of the warrior Talbot were carefully retained! Surely God judgeth not as man judgeth!

The result of Philip Henry's ⁽³⁾ labours among the people of Whitchurch and its neighbourhood was the establishment of small societies of Christian people for prayer and preaching, very much of the same nature as those formed at a later date by Wesley and his preachers. In 1681, Philip Henry was prosecuted and fined for keeping conventicles. His son Mathew Henry inherited his father's love of Christian labour, and diligently followed up his good work. Although he was designed to follow the law, and was actually admitted at Gray's

(3) Mr. Wesley entertained a very high opinion of Philip Henry. In one of the early "Minutes of Conference" (1765) he strongly recommends to be read publicly that part of Mr. Philip Henry's life enforcing family prayer morning and evening.

Inn, he was soon induced to devote himself to the work of God, and accepted an invitation to become the pastor of a church in Chester.

Of the early dawn of Wesleyan Methodism in Whitchurch and its neighbourhood, we possess very scanty materials for a history. The Minutes of Conference do not afford us the least assistance in ascertaining to what circuit it belonged in those days, and it is only by an incidental allusion elsewhere that we learn it was attached for a time to the Chester circuit. Nevertheless we may assume that it had a fair share of the labours of the itinerant ministers and local preachers of the Connexion. Anyhow it is very apparent that the ground was well prepared for Mr. Wesley's visit to sow the seed of the gospel of Christ, and equally evident that he was highly gratified by his cordial reception by the people, his overwhelming congregation, and above all the abundant signs that "God was evidently present." It is difficult to find throughout the whole of his diary a more cheerful and satisfactory record than the one relating to this visit to Whitchurch.

We are left to conjecture who invited Mr. Wesley to come to Whitchurch. The minutes of conference for 1744 laid down a rule for connexional preachers going to a new place. "What is a sufficient call to a new place?" to which the answer is, "An invitation from a serious man, fearing God, who has a house to receive us." Such an invitation from someone who had benefited by his ministry elsewhere had reached him. One is naturally curious to know who this could have been. We shall probably fine the solution to this in the record of his next visit. Only four months elapsed before he

was again at Whitchurch. He was on his way from Ireland July the 23rd, and landing at Park Gate, he drove on to Liverpool, and on Thursday, the 25th he writes :— “I rode across the country to Whitchurch, and spent an agreeable evening with that lovely family.” Unfortunately no name is given. This provoking reticense leaves us in the dark just at the point where our curiosity is excited ; but recent investigations made by that indefatigable collector of historical facts connected with Methodism, Mr. R. Thursfield Smith, lead him to the conclusion that it was a family named Brown ,a descendant of which was still living when he gave me the information. To the hospitality of this family he probably owed the first invitation, and it is beyond doubt it was to the agreeable character of this family that his second visit was largely due, coupled with the hearty and sympathetic reception accorded him by the people.

But we must not overlook the good work which had previously been done in Whitchurch and its neighbourhood by the band of earnest Methodist laymen, supported by the connexional ministers. Thomas Olivers and others of whom no record remains, had not been negligent of these parts. Seventeen years ago there lived at Tarts Hill, not far from Hanmer, W. Heighway, an old man, who furnished Mr. Smith with his early recollections of Methodist mission work in Flintshire, close upon the Shropshire border, a few miles west of Whitchurch ; and as this might be taken as a sample of what took place elsewhere, we may appropriately introduce the narrative here. He writes :—“The earliest I can remember of Methodism is about the year 1770, when the Methodists preached at Joseph Wynn’s [house], near the New Hall, Bonnington. My father was

present, but never heard the preacher's name. It appears they continued to hold meetings there for fifty years. They did not make much progress until Mr. Platt, of the Fenns, or Old Fenn's Hall, and the [family] of Alw~~ards~~^{ards} of Bonnington, took up the cause. Both families came about the same time to live in Bonnington from the neighbourhood of Nantwich, and this resulted in the building of the chapel at Broad Oak, in the year 1820." It thus appears that it took fifty years of quiet Christian labour to establish and house a Methodist church on the ground where Philip Henry and others had bestowed, long ago, so much labour. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand, for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they shall be alike good."—*Eccl. xi, 6.* Mr. Heighway proceeds to say:—"During the latter end of 1790 (or about that date), there came missionaries at different times to preach about Iscoed, on the common in the open air; but with little success. During that time there was one Mr. Tregortha, from Staffordshire, who preached about the country, I cannot say where, but Methodism made little progress on the whole until 1810."

Early in the following year (March 27, 1772) Mr. Wesley was preaching at Nantwich, included at that time in the Cheshire Circuit; in the afternoon he again directed his course to Whitchurch, this being his third visit within eight months, a striking evidence of the interest he felt in its spiritual welfare. It is but ten miles from the one town to the other, but it turned out to be an exceedingly uncomfortable journey. In his journal he writes:—"I preached at Nantwich about noon, and then dragged through a miserable road, till, within two or three miles of Whitchurch, the chaise stuck fast, and

all our strength could not get it a yard farther. So I took horse and rode to the town." Who can help admiring the wonderful vigour of this man, now in his seventieth year, undeterred in his benevolent mission by the badness of the roads and the inclemency of a March day !

Mr. Fletcher was not unacquainted with the friends of Methodism in Whitchurch, and was there the year after, as it appears from the following interesting letter he wrote to Mr. Joseph Benson :—

Whitchurch, 12th February, 1773.

My Dear Brother,

Fifty times I have had an inclination to write to you and thank you for your kind invitation to the Leeds Conference, where I should have been glad to confer with my dear friend about the one thing needful. Now the time is come to write to you ; on the present occasion I can delay no longer. I have just joined the hand of Captain Webb to that of Miss Gilbert. I am in love with the Captain, who has set his heart upon taking you with him over to America. His pious lady wants it much also. You will say "Why me rather than another," I reply, for the following grand reason :—God has certainly a people, a great people, gathering apace in that part of the world. Satan, therefore, appears to be about to put his old maxim in practice, Divide and conquer.

Mr. Piercy, who has set W[est] Bromwich by the ears, through his high principles, is gone over with six or seven of our dear Lady Students. In all probability they will sow the seeds of discord, and make a breach in the rising societies. Very probably this will occasion some publications. We have few men there capable of managing the difficult points of a controversy. You have been at the University of Oxford. This circumstance, with the understanding and knowledge the lord has given you, will make it much more proper for *you*, than for another to go over. Bro : Webb, whose devotedness and fire will do you good, finds a peculiar impression on his mind about it, and you will have the finest opportunity in the world of sailing in good weather and good

company. Lay the matter before God, and if your heart answers to our heart here, write to Mr. Wesley as soon as you are determined. Offer him your company if he goes, or offer to go without him if he stay. The ship will sail from Bristol in the beginning of April. God direct you in all things. With a single eye you cannot go wrong. While I ask it for you, ask it for your faithful

Friend and loving brother,

J. FLETCHER.

Lady H[untingdon] has shewn me great love, altho' she would not see me, and prays daily for me with many tears. I have preached in one of her chapels, that of Glazebrook, at Ashley. I hope we shall all get to be one in *heart*.

Captain Webb was a soldier in the British Army, who had seen considerable service in the American war. He received a serious wound at Louisburg, from a musket ball, which struck him near the right eye, and destroyed it, passing through his palate into his mouth, and down his throat. With other wounded men he was conveyed ashore in a boat, but was so much exhausted by loss of blood that he fainted, and was thought to be dead. Fortunately, however, he came to himself, and giving signs of life he was placed in the hospital, where he ultimately recovered. After this he served under General Wolfe, in the memorable expedition against Quebec, in 1759, where he was wounded in the right arm. Some years later when at Bristol he was so fortunate as to hear Mr. Wesley preach, and was so much affected by what he heard, that he was led to give himself up to the service of the Lord. Returning to America, he was quartered at Albany as barrack-master, and while there he was instrumental in rendering valuable help to the small Methodist Church in New York, and by his zeal and activity was the means of the first chapel of the Connexion being built in that city.

Like Captain Scott he was proud of his uniform, and always preached in it. There is a portrait of him extant, which represents him standing at a table, on which his unsheathed sword is placed between him and the bible. He appears as a broad shouldered man, of a military carriage, with a somewhat full face and large well-formed features, the right eye covered with a black shade, the band supporting it passing across his forehead, binding his rather long hair. The customary pig-tail of the period is just visible over his shoulder. He points with his left hand to a passage in the open bible before him, and his right hand is laid upon his left breast, the general attitude being that of a man making an earnest and confident appeal to those he is addressing on some great topic of the Gospel.

So zealous was he in his American work that he wrote a strong appeal to Mr. Wesley to send Missionaries to their help; in answer Mr. Wesley sent Mr. R. Boardman and Mr. Joseph Pilmoor, the first itinerant preachers of the connexion that laboured in New York and Philadelphia. Mr. Boardman wrote a letter on his arrival (Oct. 31, 1769) to Mr. Wesley, in which he said—"We were not a little surprised to find Captain Webb in town, and a society of about a hundred members, who desired to be in close connexion with you. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

We have an admirable sketch of Captain Webb, by Mr. Wesley's own pen. "Captain Webb preached at the Foundery. I admire the wisdom of God, in still raising up various preachers, according to the various tastes of men. The Captain is all life and fire: therefore, although he is not deep or regular, yet many who

would not hear a better preacher flock together to hear him. And many are convinced under his preaching ; some are justified ; a few built up." (Journal, Feb. 2, 1773). That Mr. Wesley's estimate of him was correct as to the good he did is evident from what we have already said ; but the following interesting extract, taken from Samuel Bardsley's Diary, may be added :—“ I saw a young gentleman at Manchester (his name is Mather) who has been connected with the Independents. His prejudices were very remarkable against dear Mr. Wesley, and his Societies, but lately he was at London and went to various places to hear the gospel. At West Street Chapel he heard Captain Webb, who insisted much on believers growing in grace, and the necessity of loving God with all their hearts. He thought the Captain's arguments had scripture to defend them, and the Lord convinced him that it was not only his duty but his invaluable privilege to press forward toward the mark. He gave himself up to fasting and prayer, and the language of his heart was :—

“ A drop of love cannot suffice
My soul for all thine image cries.”

Jesus, that lover of his people, heard and answered, to the joy of his soul. He was at one of our dear friends' [houses] when the answer of peace was sent down. The tidings were so good, and the comfort that attended them so great, that he could not avoid falling down on the floor, and lying before his gracious Benefactor in speechless awe. Soon, very soon, he could, to the glory of the Lord, declare by blessed experience that the “ Blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth from all sin.” He now and then gives a word of exhortation, and is

likely to be useful. I was several times in company with him, and found it blessed to me."(1).

The lady of Captain Webb's choice. Miss Gilbert, was probably a connexion of Nathaniel Gilbert, Esq., already mentioned, Speaker of the House of Assembly, in Antigua ; but of this we have no positive knowledge. After their marriage they returned to America, but when the revolution in that country broke out they came to England and resided at Bristol. He died December, 1796.

(1) In a letter to Miss A. M. Stephenson, of Sheffield, from Samuel Bardsley's unpublished Diary, kindly lent me by Mr. Stamp.

(2) See Whitchurch Circuit *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, vol. I., page 73, from which the above account of Captain Webb is derived.



END OF PART I.



